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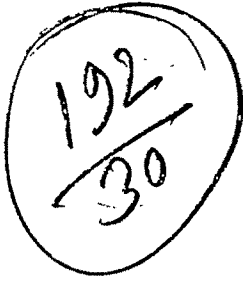
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Jharna Sanyal



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KING OEDIPUS : SOME ELEMENTARY CONSIDERATIONS

Ramkrishna Bhattacharya

I. OEDIPUS THROUGH THE AGES

Students of Greek tragedy are often struck by divergences in the handling of legends by the three masters, some of whose plays have survived. The fact is that the legends were not uniform and the dramatists in Greece enjoyed the licence of adding, altering and even inventing new episodes to make their plays more tragic.¹ Euripides is known to have taken the utmost liberty in rewriting the traditional tales. This is only too apparent in his handling of the story of Oedipus in the *Phoenician Maidens* (*Phoinissai*). The play has been acclaimed as "a tragedy in which poetry for once fulfilled Pater's prediction by aspiring after the condition of an operatic libretto."² Unfortunately, there are some "appalling corruptions and interpolations" in the text that has come down to us. It is a late play by Euripides (after 413 BCE, according to some authorities, c. 408), in which the stories of Sophocles's *King Oedipus* and *Antigone* are combined, including a hint of *Oedipus at Colonus*.

Before going into a discussion of Euripides's play, I would like to remind the reader that Sophocles was not the only Greek dramatist to deal with the Oedipus legend. He composed three separate Theban plays written at different stages of his career. They did not form a trilogy but were staged as independent plays (the last one, *Oedipus at Colonus*, posthumously). However, some eight or nine tragedies, entitled *Oedipus*, are known to have been composed before and after Sophocles, although none has survived. The names of the dramatists, however, are known.³

Sophocles's version of the legend differs widely from the earliest version found in the two Homeric epics. It is only to be expected, since Sophocles found the subjects of his plays both from written and oral sources. 'For some reason which is not clearly apparent, both he and Aeschylus drew more largely from the Cyclic poets than from "our Homer". The inferior and more recent Epics, which are now lost, were probably more episodic, and thus presented a more inviting repertory of legends than the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.'⁴ In the *Iliad* we are told that Oedipus died in Thebes. His burial was followed by funeral games, attended by kings from other lands.

....Euryalus alone uprose to face him (sc. Epeius, son of Panopeus), a godlike man, son of King Mecisteus, son of Talaus, who on a time had come to Thebes for the burial of Oedipus [Oidupodao], when he had fallen and there had worsted all the sons of Cadmus.⁵

So Oedipus's death somewhere at Colonus must have been a later invention, adopted by both Sophocles and Euripides.

Similarly, in the *Odyssey* Oidipodes (not Oidipous) and Epikaste (not Iokaste) came to know soon after their marriage that he was a parricide. Epikaste committed suicide but Oidipodes continued to rule over the Kadmeians in Thebes, although haunted by his mother-wife's curses :

And I (*sc.* Odysseus) saw the mother of Oedipodes, fair Epikaste, who wrought a monstrous deed in ignorance of mind, in that she wedded her own son, and he, when he had slain his own father, wedded her, and straightway the gods made these things known among men. Howbeit he abode as Lord of the Cadmeans in lovely Thebe, suffering woes through the baneful counsels of the gods, but she went down to the house of Hades, the strong warder. She made fast a noose on high from a lofty beam, overpowered by her sorrow, but for him she left behind woes full many, even all that the Avengers of a mother bring to pass.⁶

There are no references to the Sphinx, the self-blinding of Oedipus and the birth of his four children prior to that event.

However, the story of Eteocles and Polynices was known to Hesiod. Some of the "god-like race of hero-men" (*heros*) died in the land of Cadmus at seven-gated Thebes "when they fought for the flocks of Oedipus" (Οἰδίποδαο).⁷ The Theban cycle of myths attributes the motherhood of these children, not to Iocasta but to a second wife of Oedipus called Euryganeia.⁸

The epic called the *Cyprian Lays* (*Kypria*) is known to have contained the story of Oedipus. But it was the *Thebaid* (*Thebais*), another epic, that refers to the curse that Oedipus pronounced on his sons, but for a different reason (he had earlier commanded them not to set the wine cups used by Laius on his table, and that is what they did).⁹

Pindar (518-438 BCE), in one of his odes (*Olympian* 2.38-45), tells:

But diverse are the currents that at divers times come upon men, either with joys or with toils. Even thus Fate (*moira*), which handeth a kindly fortune down from sire to son, bringeth at another time some sad reverse, together with the heaven-sent bliss, from the day when that fated son met and slew Laius, and thus fulfilled the oracle spoken of old at Pytho. But keen-eyed Fury (*Erinnus*) saw it, and caused his war-like sons to be slain by one another's hands. Yet Polynices, when laid low, left behind him a son, Thersander who was honoured amid youthful contests and amid the conflicts of war, a scion destined to succour the house of the descendants of Adrastus....¹⁰

Aeschylus (525-456 BCE) wrote a trilogy of which only the last one, *Seven against*

Thebes, has survived. The titles of the first two plays were *Laius* and *Oedipus* and there was a satyric play called the *Sphinx*. The general outline of the second play can be guessed from the following passage in the *Seven against Thebes* :

For who of men was ever so admired of gods and of those that share with them the city's hearth, the thronged gathering of men, as Oedipus was honoured that day when he freed the land of that deadly pest whose prey was man?

But when, to his misery, he came to know aright his ill-starred bridal, sore grieving at his pain, with frenzied heart he worked a twofold ill : with the hand that had slain his sire he reft him of his eyes, dearer to him than his own children.

And against his sons, because of their cruel tendency, he launched malisons of wrath (ah me! malisons of bitter tongue) — even that they with sword in hand should in time to come divide his substance. But now I tremble lest the Spirit of Vengeance with hurrying pace may work their accomplishment.¹¹

This is almost identical with Sophocles's version of the legend, excepting that Sophocles shifts the operation of the supernatural machinery from the Furies (as found in Aeschylus) to Apollo, the god of prophecy. He also changes the location of the "three roads" from Eotniae to Phocis.

It is therefore no wonder that Euripides's version will differ from Sophocles's, as Sophocles's differed from Aeschylus's. In Euripides, first of all, Iocasta does not hang herself when the identity of Oedipus is revealed, although Oedipus blinds himself. He is kept "close-warded" by his own sons in the Theban palace. He curses his sons that they may share their heritage with the sword.¹²

Secondly, it is only after the mutual killing of both her sons that Iocasta snatches a sword from the dead body of Eteocles and drives it through her mid neck, "and with her best-beloved / Lies dead, embracing with her arms the twain" (vv. 1458-59).¹³

Thirdly, Creon banishes Oedipus in the interest of Thebes, not before the death of Oedipus's sons (as in Sophocles's *Oedipus at Colonus*) but after, acting upon the prophecy of Teiresias (vv. 1590-94).¹⁴

Otherwise, the story related by Iocasta in the beginning of the play (vv. 10-62) does not differ substantially from Sophocles's version. However, neither Aeschylus nor Euripides tells us how the facts of parricide and incest were revealed to Oedipus. *The Odyssey* refers to the facts known (see above), whereas Sophocles devotes a significant part of the play to the unravelling of the mystery of Oedipus's identity.

We have already reached the last part of the legend. Unlike Sophocles, Euripides does not portray Antigone as a defiant young girl, upholding Zeus's law against Creon's. Creon, in fact, claims that the order of not allowing burial to Polynices was issued by Eteocles, not by him (v. 1646). Although at first Antigone boldly declares, "I, though the state (*polis*) forbid, will bury him" (v.1657), afterwards she appears to recoil at the threat uttered by Creon. She merely seeks permission to spread dust over Polynices – for Iocasta's sake. Failing in that appeal, she tells Creon, "Suffer at least that I may bathe the corpse." Creon denies her even that. Ultimately Antigone entreats, "Let me at least bind up his cruel wounds." Creon remains adamant and that is where the matter ends, with Antigone's last prayer to be allowed to kiss Polynices's lips. Creon now threatens, "Mar not thy bridal's fortune by laments" (vv. 1658-72).

This is where Antigone rises to the occasion. She refuses to marry her betrothed Haemon, son of Creon : she would rather exile with her "hapless sire" (v. 1679). So Creon banishes both Oedipus and Antigone, and Oedipus is made to lament the deaths of his wife and sons. The play ends in pity, with both Oedipus and Antigone lamenting. But strangely enough, the last choric ode celebrates Victory :

Hail, revered Victory!

Rest upon my life; and me

Crown, and crown eternally! (vv. 1764-66)¹⁵

Compared with Sophocles's, or even Aeschylus's, Euripides's Antigone appears to be a pale shadow.¹⁶ But that is not the only difference. In the *Suppliants* Euripides tells the story of the Seven against Thebes again. But in his *Antigone*, available only in fragments, the story takes a different turn.¹⁷

Euripides's version of the Oedipus story was followed by Statius (c.45-96), a Latin epic poet. In his *Thebaid*, Jocasta dies over the dead bodies of her sons. Seneca (4 BCE - CE 65), however, followed Sophocles's version in his *Oedipus*. But he never wrote an *Antigone*, perhaps because of the lack of revenge motif in Sophocles's play.

Seneca was not the last dramatist to write on the Oedipus legend. Ever since the Renaissance, dramatists of different countries have written new plays on Oedipus, adding and altering some events to suit their own taste as also the taste of their times. Mention may be made of the following : Thomas Evans (1615), Corneille (1657), John Dryden (1679), Voltaire (1718), Heinrich von Kleist (1806), Hugo von Hofmannsthal (1906), Jean Cocteau (1925, 1934, 1942) and Andre Gide (1930/31). Igor Stravinsky's opéra oratorio, *Oedipus Rex* was produced in 1927. Pier Paolo Pasolini's film version, *Edipo Re* (1970) is in many respects a "rewriting" of Sophocles.¹⁸

The Oedipus legend with all its variations¹⁹ has, in course of time, come to be regarded as containing the very essence of tragedy. To Aristotle, Sophocles's *King Oedipus* was a model to be emulated by all tragedians. Its plot, "complex" according to his classification, provided the best example of *peripeteia* (Reversal) and *anagnorisis* (Discovery or Recognition).²⁰ The play has been translated and adapted to the stage in most of the countries of the world. Well-known directors, actors and actresses have made their marks in different styles of production. Sophocles's version of the legend has generally been accepted as the principal one, other versions remaining either unknown or ignored.

II. INTRUSION OF HISTORY INTO LEGEND : A CASE STUDY OF *KING OEDIPUS*

Anachronism has been described as the misplacing of a person, or object or event outside of its historical time frame.¹ Shakespeare, for example, makes Cleopatra wear Elizabethan corsets (*Antony and Cleopatra* I.iii.71) and play billiards (II.v.3). A clock strikes in *Julius Caesar* (II.i.193) and, to cap it all, wise Nestor, the legendary Greek character, refers to Aristotle in *Troilus and Cressida* (II.iii.166), beside which the overcharged cannons in *Macbeth* (I.ii.37) pale into commonplace absurdity. Then there are plain mistakes called anachorism, i.e., any action, scene, or character placed where it does not belong.² The deserts (= sea coast) in Bohemia in *The Winter's Tale* (III.iii.2), like the mention of Cortez as the discoverer of the Pacific in Keats's sonnet, "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer", is a classic specimen of anachorism.

All this may be excused as unintended factual errors. They may be explained away as examples of the so-called poetic licence. Modern writers like Shaw or Brecht sometimes intentionally alter the facts and sequences of events in their historical plays in order to create the impression of contemporary reality. This is also true of Shakespeare's plays produced in modern dress. Orson Welles produced *Julius Caesar* in the Mercury Theatre, Broadway, New York, in 1938. Caesar was dressed as Benito Mussolini, the fascist leader and the then premier of Italy.³ Intended or unintended, anachorism is part and parcel of all arts, literary works and paintings in particular.

Conscious anachronisms and anachorisms are to be found in some paintings by Brueghel (c.1525-69). His "Massacre of the Innocents" (c.1566), for instance, portrays Herod's soldiers as a Spanish punitive force attacking a Flemish village.⁴ Rubens's "The Rape of the Sabines" (c.1635), like Pouissin's in the eighteenth century and Picasso's in the twentieth, used the legendary material and "by purposeful anachronisms suggested its contemporary relevance. His ancient warriors and their victims wear seventeenth-century garb, the architecture is that of imperial Rome."⁵

The issue, however, becomes more complicated when we notice some events or customs of the author's own times occurring in a work, the story of which is derived

from myths and legends. Not that they are to be taken as cases of anachorism. Nor are they unintended mistakes (for who can say with certainty whether such events and customs did *not* prevail even in earlier times elsewhere?). The point is that historical time (i.e., events taking place at a definite point of space and time that can be specifically located and dated) sometimes intrudes into legendary time (a once-upon-a-time world which cannot be dated and only rarely located). Even though the Greek dramatists did not compose plays in the naturalist or realist tradition – nor did the audience expect them to do so – such intrusions of historical time recur almost as an inevitable feature. In what follows we shall cite a few such instances as may be detected in Sophocles's *King Oedipus*.

The play opens with a scene of plague in Thebes. The plague was no part of the Oedipus legend. Its recorded versions – from Homer's *Odyssey* and other sources before Sophocles – do not mention any such pestilence. But a plague indeed broke out at Athens in 430 BCE. B.M.W. Knox was the first to point out "the addition of *nosos* [sickness, disease] to the traditional blight incurred by pollution and the (otherwise puzzling) attribution of responsibility for the plague to Ares".⁶ These, he proposed, are to be related to the plague at Athens, Knox further argued that the play may be dated after the recurrence of the plague, i.e., after the autumn of 427, preferably the summer of 425 BCE.⁷

It is understandable that the reference to the plague in the *prologos* in *King Oedipus* would immediately strike the Athenian audience and remind them of a recent experience. Thus, a bond of common experience is immediately established between the audience and the suppliants and the Chorus in the play.

In describing the two altars in Thebes, "the two shrines of Pallas (Athena)" (v. 20) Sophocles may have been thinking more of his contemporary Athens than of legendary Thebes. As Jebb comments, "It was enough for Soph. that his Athenian hearers would think of the Erechtheum and the Parthenon - the shrines of the Polias and the Parthenos - above them on the acropolis."⁸

After the end of the first choric ode (*parodos*) Oedipus comes out of the palace and addresses the Chorus. He cautions them: "I charge you that no one of this land, whereof I hold the empire and the throne, give shelter or speak word unto that murderer, whosoever he be...." (vv. 236-38). Since the identity of Laius's assassin is still unknown, such a measure may appear to be futile. However, Knox points out: "Yet exactly such a proclamation, against an unidentified murderer, is recommended in Plato's *Laws*, and there are indications that it was standard practice in fifth-century Athens."⁹

In the first episode, Teiresias is charged and condemned by Oedipus in the double role of the prosecuting counsel and judge. Oedipus, enraged, calls Teiresias "a scheming juggler (*magon*), ... a tricky quack (*hagurten*)" (v.387). Jebb notes: "The word *magos* expresses contempt for the rights of divination practised by Teiresias: *hagurtes* [*lit. a*

cheat, mountebank] taunts him as a mercenary imposter."¹⁰ Jebb adds : "The passage shows how Asiatic superstitions had already spread among the vulgar, and were scorned by the educated, in Greece. The Persian *magos* (as conceived by the Greeks) was one who claimed to command the aid of beneficent deities...". The word could not have reached Greece before she came into contact with Persia, i.e. not earlier than the fifth century BCE. The word *magos* came to mean, among other things, *one of the wise men* or *seers in Persia* who interpreted dreams.¹¹

Now it is Teiresias's turn to speak. He says, "King though thou art, the right of reply, at least, must be deemed the same for both; of that I too am lord" (vv. 408-09). This insistence on the "right of reply", a right on a par with the king's, is in keeping with the Athenian custom of Sophocles's own days. Only a free-born native citizen had the right to plead his own case without having recourse to an advocate. "The resident foreigner was called a metic (*metoikos*). At Athens he must find a citizen protector and register with the authorities, paying a small annual tax; in return he acquired effectively full protection at law and most of the duties of a citizen.... or to own landed property in Attica."¹²

Jebb has paraphrased Teiresias's speech in greater details :

You charge me with being the tool of Creon's treason. I have a right to plead my own cause when I am thus accused. I am not like a resident alien, who can plead before a civic tribunal only by the mouth of that patron under whom he has been registered.¹³

He further explains : "Every *metoikos* [foreign settler] at Athens was required *epigraphesthai prostaten*, i.e. to have the name of a citizen, as patron, inscribed over his own."¹⁴

Objection may be raised on the ground that such a custom was not exclusively Athenian, it was prevalent in other city states too. So there is no reason why legendary Thebes could not have the same law regarding resident citizens and resident aliens. This may be quite true, but what needs to be noticed here is that the speech of Teiresias would be readily comprehensible and appear perfectly justified to the audience of Sophocles, reflecting as it does the current custom of their own. The temporal gap between legend and history is thus bridged.

At the end of the first *stasimon* the Chorus sadly reflect :

Nay, Zeus indeed and Apollo are keen of thought, and know the things of earth; but that mortal seer wins knowledge above mine, of this there can be no sure test; though man may surpass man in lore (vv. 499-502).

Knox interprets the lines in the following manner :

They (*scil.* the Chorus) are not rejecting divine foreknowledge and prophecy – "Zeus and Apollo know" – only the fallible visions of a human prophet. This was a respectable position in fifth-century Athens, where there were many professional prophets, some of them exploiters of public credulity for their own profit.¹⁵

The last example is taken from Oedipus's admonition of Creon. He says, "Now is not thine attempt foolish, – to seek, without followers or friends, a throne, – a prize which followers and wealth must win?" (vv. 541-42). The idea is pretty clear : a usurper must have both men and money; men both for supporting his claim and fighting for it, and money, for raising mercenary troops. Such was the standard practice of all would-be *turannoi* in ancient Greece in historical times. It is pretty obvious that 'Soph. is thinking of the historical *turannos*, who commonly began his career as a demagogue, or else "arose out of the bosom of the oligarchies".¹⁶

Last but not least, I would like to refer to a rather dubious contemporary allusion. The Chorus at the end of the second *stasimon* sadly declare :

But if any man walks haughtily in deed or word, with no fear of Justice, no reverence for the images of gods, may an evil doom seize him for his ill-starred pride, if he will not win his vantage fairly, nor keep him from unholy deeds, but must lay profaning hands on sanctities. (vv. 883-91)

Jebb wonders :

Is Sophocles glancing here at the mutilators of the Hermae in 415 B.C., and especially at Alcibiades? We can hardly say more than this:— (1) There is no positive probability as to the date of the play which can be set against such a view. (2) The language suits it, – nay, might well suggest it ... (3) It cannot be assumed that the dramatic art of Sophocles would exclude such a reference.¹⁷

In spite of all this, Jebb cautiously notes : "Direct contemporary allusion is, indeed, uncongenial to it. But a light touch like this – especially in a choral ode – might fitly strike a chord of contemporary feeling in unison with the emotion stirred by the drama itself."¹⁸

It is not my purpose to claim that Sophocles was consciously trying to incorporate matters that would be readily understandable and create for his play an illusion of reality to the audience at Athens. The whole process may have been an unconscious one. However, the fact remains that such echoes of historical time find their place in a play concerned with legendary time. The echoes, conscious or unconscious, did help the contemporary audience to conceive the events of hoary antiquity in terms of experience similar to their own.

III. OEDIPUS AGONISTES

King Oedipus is a tragedy of prophecy par excellence. In a broadcast talk, W.H. Auden discussed the play along with Shakespeare's *Macbeth* : "I have selected these because in both of them there is a prophecy about the future which comes true."¹ The fact, however, is that there are a number of prophecies in both the plays but they are not exactly the same in their purport. The Weird Sisters revelled in quibbles : every prophecy made by them was a conundrum which *Macbeth* took literally (as most men would). If someone is assured that "none of woman born" shall harm him (IV.iii.80), he would take his would-be killer to be a mythical being, not human or earthly. The idea of a Caesarean child — "from his mother's womb / Untimely ripp'd" (V.ix. 15-16) — is too far-fetched to think of. Similarly, the prospect of the Birnam Wood coming to high Dunsinane Hill (IV.iii.93), under normal circumstances, appears equally absurd. Who could foresee a camouflage? "Beware the Thane of Fife" (IV.iii.71) is a very general warning, which few would link with any person not born of a mother's womb.

The prophecies in *Macbeth*, thus, are examples of equivocation, "paltering in a double sense", more riddles than prophecies. Not that the Greek oracle never equivocated.² But so far as *King Oedipus* is concerned, the prophecies are unambiguous. Even before Oedipus was born, it had been decided by the gods (or *dike*, justice personified or *tuche*, fortune, or *moira*, fate or *chronos*, time) that the son of Laius and Iocasta would commit parricide (vv. 711-14). There is no quibbling here : it has got nothing to do with what Oedipus does or avoids doing. Every prophecy is inexorable and inevitable, since predetermination is the basis of all prophecies.³ If a man's fate is preordained, all his efforts to avert the consequences will ultimately prove futile. So the question of Oedipus's responsibility should not arise in connection with an event the culmination of which has been foretold and hence foreclosed.

But this is not the only prophecy in *King Oedipus*. Oedipus himself was told by the Delphic oracle that he would marry his mother, beget children, and also kill his father (vv. 791-93). The two prophecies — one made to Laius and the other to Oedipus — are not all alike, although most students (and some scholars too) generally take them to be so. There was no mention of incest in what Laius and Iocasta were told by the oracle (see v. 1176).

This is not all. There are two more prophecies in the play. The first is the one with which the play opens. Creon reports what the Delphic oracle has said : the murderer of Laius has to be executed or banished, otherwise the curse of the plague would not be lifted (vv. 100-01). This also is a clear enough prophecy, in spite of the fact that the killer was not named. Were he named, the task of finding him out and duly punishing him

would have been easier. As the oracle did not reply to Oedipus's simple question, "Who are my parents?", so did Delphi, this time, withhold the name of Laius's assassin.

The other prophecy comes from Teiresias. Before leaving the stage, he quietly says:

And I tell thee – the man of whom thou hast this long while been in quest, uttering threats, and proclaiming a search into the murder of – Laius – that man is here, – in seeming an alien sojourner, but anon he shall be found of native Theban, and shall not be glad of his fortune. A blind man, he who now hath sight, a beggar, who now is rich, he shall make his way to a strange land, feeling the ground before him with his staff. And he shall be found at once brother and father of the children with whom he consorts; son and husband of the woman who bore him; heir to his father's bed, shedder of his father's blood.

So go thou in and think on that; and if thou find that I have been at fault, say thenceforth that I have no wit in prophecy. (vv. 449-62)⁴

This amounts to nothing more than a repetition of what the oracle told Oedipus. And finally, there is a mention of sending an emissary to Delphi again, after the suicide of Iocasta and the self-blinding of Oedipus (vv. 1438-39, 1141-42). *King Oedipus* remains open-ended, with Creon and all waiting for the god's words: the fate of Oedipus is to be decided on the basis of what the Oracle would advise.⁵

The prophecies, then, are unambiguous, although there are some gaps in what they say. Admittedly, there is a wilful suppression of actual identities – the identity of Oedipus's parents and that of the murderer of Laius. At the end, the identities are discovered: Oedipus comes to know that Laius and Iocasta, not Polybus and Merope, are his true parents (vv. 1171-81) and also that he himself is the killer of Laius (whose actual identity, of course, he did not know then). So what he first suspected to be mere homicide, or at most regicide at Phocis (see the flashback speech in the second episode, especially vv. 813-33), turns out to be parricide, himself being his father's killer. It is no longer a question of two identities, but of identity *per se* — the identity of only one person called Oedipus.

We are so far away in both space and time from the world of Sophocles – not to speak of the world when the legend of Oedipus was conceived – that it is impossible to accept the premise from which the play starts off. Barring those who believe in astrology, palmistry and the like, a modern man does not believe in prescience. The very notion of prophesying what is hidden in the womb of time, is now attributed to naïve credulity. So, how can a play, which ultimately justifies the prescience of the oracle and the impossibility of averting what is supposed to be preordained, appeal to us? How can it still move us deeply? Is it all a matter of the so-called "willing suspension of disbelief for the moment,

which constitutes poetic faith"?⁶

It is not that simple. Bertolt Brecht, while producing Sophocles, kept in mind that he was not trying to justify what the plays seek to convey at the end. His only purpose was to show how people in antiquity believed man to be the puppet of fortune.⁷ Absolute objectivity was to be maintained in the re-presentation of *Antigone*. The audience would never be allowed to forget that an "ancient poem" was being re-told and re-enacted before them, so that empathizing with the protagonist could be precluded.⁸

"Reader response" is a problematic thing. Instead of the singular, "responses" would be more proper in the context of any work of art like *King Oedipus*. Brecht's response to the Oedipus legend and the Theban plays of Sophocles follows from his theory of the A(lienation) - effect, consisting in defamiliarizing a familiar tale and making it appear as something strange to the audience.⁹ So, his response, basically historical, is one of the many possible responses. Some of us now can read or view *King Oedipus* in this light, accuse the gods for being mindlessly cruel and applaud Oedipus for his consistent, almost obsessive, search for the truth, despite counsels to the contrary. Without sharing the belief in the infallibility of the oracle, one may look at the whole play as a document of the past when most of the Greeks believed in predestination. This is one possible response that follows from Brecht.

However, there is a question regarding the prescience of the oracles. Did the Greeks not know that the oracles could be bribed and manipulated in one's favour against others? Let me quote a few lines from Herodotus :

The Athenians say that these men (*scil.* the Alcmeonidae, an Athenian family), during their stay at Delphi, bribed the Priestess to tell any Spartans that might happen to consult the oracle, either on state or private business, that it was their duty to liberate Athens; and the Spartans as a result of the constant repetition of the same injunction, sent Anchimolius, the son of Aster and a man of good reputation, at the head of an army to drive out Pisistratidae. The Pisistratidae were good friends of theirs: but no matter – commands of God were more important to them than human ties.¹⁰

Bertrand Russell points out :

There are several remarkable features in this narrative. Herodotus is a pious man, completely devoid of cynicism, and he thinks well of the Spartans for listening to the oracle. But he prefers Athens to Sparta, and in Athenian affairs he is against the Peisistratidae. Nevertheless it is the Athenians whom he cites as authorities for the bribery, and no punishment befell the successful party or the Pythoness for their impiety.¹¹

The audience of Sophocles's own time must have responded to *King Oedipus* quite differently from the way most of us do today. Belief in the inerrancy of the oracle was an article of faith with the average Greeks, who constituted Sophocles's audience. Oedipus, however, acts in a manner which appears to be contrary to this belief. I think it is this aspect of the play, viz., the way Oedipus is represented, that outweighs the question of believing or not believing in the oracles.

Oedipus is not a perfect man. He is prone to sudden fits of rage. He has a mind, as it were, in blinkers, and cannot see anything beside the notion which, however false, grips his mind. He fails to understand why Iocasta urged him not to proceed with the investigation after the revelations made by the Corinthian shepherd. Oedipus thought that further enquiry might reveal that he was base-born and that was what Iocasta was afraid of (vv. 1076-79). Even when he interrogates the Theban shepherd he insists on knowing from where the child rescued by the shepherd had been found (vv. 1160ff.). But once he comes to know the truth, he does not recoil from it. It is this commitment to the cause, viz., saving Thebes from the plague by finding out the killer of Laius, that endows him with a singular grandeur. The issue of his own identity, so long hidden, gets inextricably linked with the identity of the murderer. But Oedipus never falters; he does not evade or attempt to shirk the consequences that might ensue from his search. Thus, instead of appearing as a mere victim, he emerges as a challenger, an *agonistes*, ready to impose his will on the circumstances confronting him and prepared to sacrifice everything he has for his mission, which transcends self-knowledge. He does not retreat, but rather insists on his own banishment (vv. 1436ff.) as soon as the truth is revealed. It is not as a tragedy of prophecy or fate that *King Oedipus* has swayed the emotions of generations of readers and playgoers.¹² It stands out as the story of a man who is made sport of by the gods but does not hesitate to pursue his duty to the *polis* to the bitter end, even at the cost of his own good.

But does Oedipus not ultimately submit to his lot: "Nay, let my fate (*moira*) go whither it will...." (v. 1458)? Yes, he does. However, Oedipus's is the tragedy of the individual. Georg Lukács, taking his cue from Goethe and Hegel, formulated the issue as follows: "The evolution of the species is non-tragic, but it unfolds through countless objectively necessary individual tragedies."¹³ *King Oedipus* records an event which is unique even in the domain of myths and legends. It is only by evolving from the naïve faith in the oracles and prophecies that man advances to face the trials and tribulations of life which he knows to be man-made and not supernatural.

Notes and References :

I. OEDIPUS THROUGH THE AGES

1. Gilbert Murray, however, thinks differently. Why did Oedipus not follow Iocasta to death? "Any free composition would have made him do so; but Sophocles was bound to the saga and the saga was perfectly certain that Oedipus was alive and blind a long time afterwards. Euripides avoided the awkwardness in an ingenious way. In his *Oedipus* the hero is overpowered and blinded by the retainers when he has murdered Iocasta and is seeking to murder his children and himself." (*The Literature of Ancient Greece*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957, p.242) But, as we shall soon see, Iocasta in Euripides's *Phoenician Maidens* does not die after the revelation of Oedipus's identity; she commits suicide much later when her two sons had killed each other. (vv. 1349, 1455-59)
2. Peter Levi, *Pelican History of Greek Literature*, Harmondsworth : Penguin Books, 1985, p.226.
3. See Richard C. Jebb (ed. and trans.), *The Oedipus Tyrannus*, Amsterdam : Adolf M. Hakkert, 1966 (Reprint of the 1914 ed.), p.xxxiii. All references to the text are to this edition.
4. Lewis Campbell, "Prefatory Note to Edition of 1883", *Sophocles. The Theban Plays in English Verse*, London: Oxford University Press, 1936, p.xix.
5. *The Iliad*, 23.677-80. Trans. A.T. Murray, Vol. II, London: William Heinemann, 1967, p.545. E.V. Rieu, too, in his translation writes Oedipus instead of Oidipodas (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1956, p. 430).
6. *The Odyssey*, 11.271-80. Trans. A.T. Murray, Vol. I, London: William Heinemann, 1966, pp. 405-07. E.V. Rieu in his translation, however, writes Oedipus instead of Oidipodes, although he retains Epicaste (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1963, p. 147-48).
7. Hesiod, *Works and Days*, vv. 159-63. Trans. Hugh G. Evelyn-White, London: William Heinemann, 1967, p.15. There is a reference to "the deadly Sphinx which destroyed the Cadmeans" in Hesiod, " *Theogony*, v. 326. Ibid. p.103.
8. See Jebb (n3 above), p.xiii.
9. Ibid., p.xiv.
10. Pindar, *The Odes*, Trans. Sir John Sandys, London: William Heinemann, 1961, pp. 21-23. There is another reference to Oedipodes in the *Pythian Ode*, 4.2.63 (ibid., p.227): "Now learn and know the lore of Oedipus (*Oidipoda*)."
11. Aeschylus, *Seven against Thebes*, vv. 772-91. Trans. Herbert Weir Smyth, Vol. I, London: William Heinemann, 1963, p.387.
12. *The Phoenician Maidens*, vv. 60-67. Trans. Arthur S. Way, *Euripides*, Vol. III, London: William Heinemann, 1962, p.349.
13. Ibid., p.465.
14. Ibid., p.475.

15. Ibid., p. 491. The Chorus previously hailed victory in the same way: "Glorious is victory: if more favours yet / The Gods intend – ah, may I so be blest!" (vv. 1200-01, p.445)
16. Aeschylus, *Seven against Thebes*, vv. 1047-58. Antigone defies the state and tells the herald, "Strife is the last of gods to close dispute. I will bury him that lieth here. Spare thy flood of talk." (vv. 1057-58). Trans. H.W. Smyth (n11 above), p.417.
17. "According to yet another version, perhaps invented by Euripides (we have only fragments of his 'Antigone'), Antigone, detected burning her brother's body by night, was handed over by Creon to Haemon to be killed. But Haemon hid her in a shepherd's hut and pretended that he had killed her. Later their son, having come to Thebes for a festival, was recognized by a birthmark common to all his family. To escape from Creon's vengeance, Haemon and Antigone killed themselves or were saved by divine intervention." Sir Paul Harvey, *The Oxford Companion to Classical Literature*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984, "Oedipus", p. 293.
18. See Jebb (n3 above), pp. xxxiii-xlvii, Martin Mueller, *Children of Oedipus and Other Essays on Imitation of Greek Tragedy 1550-1800*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980, specially pp. 109-145 and P.E. Easterling (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy*, Cambridge, Cambridge : University Press, 1999, pp. 240-53.
19. For other versions of the Oedipus legend and their sources, see Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths*, Vol. II, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1955, Chs. 105-06, pp. 9-21.
20. *The Poetics*, Chs. 11, 13, 14-16, 24-26.

II. INTRUSION OF HISTORY INTO LEGEND : A CASE STUDY OF KING OEDIPUS

1. Chris Baldick, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990, p.8.
2. J.A. Cuddon, *A Dictionary of Literary Terms*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1984. p.36.
3. *The Wordsworth Dictionary of Shakespeare*, Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 1990, p.329. H. Granville-Barker, however, did not approve of *Hamlet* in modern dress. See his *Prefaces to Shakespeare*, Vol. I (1930), London: B.T. Batsford, 1963, pp. 19-20.
4. Bertolt Brecht has called this "Alienation Effects in the Narrative Pictures of the Elder Brueghel", *Brecht on Theatre*, ed. and trans. John Willett, New Delhi: Radha Krishna Prakashan, 1979, pp. 157-59.
5. *The Great Artists* 13, New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1978, plates 10-12.
6. R.P. Winnington-Ingram, *Sophocles. An Interpretation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985, p. 342. B.M. W. Knox's article was originally published in *The American Journal of Philology* 77 (1956), pp. 133-47, but it is not available to me. Hence this resort to Winnington-Ingram.
7. Ibid.
8. Trans. Richard C. Jebb, p.14n.

9. Bernard Knox, "Notes", *The Three Theban Plays*, trans. Robert Fagles, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1984, p.407n on v. 271 (in Fagles's trans.).
10. Ibid., p.62n on v.387.
11. H.G. Liddell and R.Scott, *A Greek English Lexicon*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968, s.v. Incidentally, *hagurtes* originally meant a priest, specially of Cybele, "who sought money from house to house ... or in public places, for predictions or expiatory rites" (Jebb, p.63n on v.388).
12. John Boardman et al (ed.), *Oxford History of the Classical World*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988, p. 222. The word, *metoikos*, has been glossed as "*an alien who has suffered to settle in the city on payment of a tax (metoikion)*, yet without enjoying civic rights" in *A Greek English Lexicon* (n11 above).
13. Jebb, p.65n on v.401.
14. Ibid.
15. Bernard Knox (n9 above), p.409 on vv. 526-72 (in Fagles's trans.).
16. Jebb, p. 81n. The quotation at the end is from George Grote's *A History of Greece*.
17. Jebb, p. 120n on v. 886.
18. Ibid, Jebb also refers to *Oedipus at Colonus*, v. 1537 and in his notes repeats the same conjecture with some reservations:

I do not suppose that the poet directly *alludes* to any contemporary event; but we may surmise that, when he wrote these lines, he had in his thought the daring outrage on religion at Athens in 415 B.C., – the partial impunity of its authors (including Alcibiades), – and the tremendous disasters of the city two years later.

Sophocles, Part 2, *The Oedipus Coloneus*, Amsterdam: Servio—Publishers, 1963, p.237n. Italics in the original.

III. OEDIPUS AGONISTES

1. "Macbeth and Oedipus" (1955), extracted in Laurence Lerner (ed.), *Shakespeare's Tragedies*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1963, p.219. Although the editor notes that the extract, originally published in the *Listener*, 16 June 1955, is taken 'From "The Dyer's Hand" by W.H. Auden' (p.223), it is found in no edition of *The Dyer's Hand* I have been able to consult.
2. The oracular Apollo had a surname, Loxias, which was 'popularly connected with *loxos*, "oblique"...., as = the giver of *indirect*, ambiguous responses.' Richard C. Jebb, p. 115n on v.853. This obscurity was a standing problem in Aeschylus's time. Cf. *Agamemnon*, vv. 1251-55.

CHORUS : Who is the man by whom this woeful deed is being brought about?

CASSANDRA : For, indeed, you have been thrown from the tracks of my oracles.

- CHORUS : Yes, for I do not understand the scheme of him who
will accomplish it.
- CASSANDRA : And yet I know the Greek tongue all too well.
- CHORUS : So do the oracles of Pytho; yet they are hard to
understand no less.

(Trans. Hugh Lloyd-Jones, Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, [1970], p.85). For a general survey of the Greek oracles see Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths*, Hamondsworth: Penguin Books, Vol. I, 1966, pp.178-82. Blind faith in the oracle subsided in course of time, particularly after the rise of Christianity. For a denunciation of the oracles see John Milton, "On the Morning of Christ's Nativity", lines 177-184:

The oracles are dumb,
No voice or hideous hum,
Runs through the arched roof in words deceiving.
Apollo from his shrine
Can no more divine,
With hollow shriek the steep of Delphos leaving.
No nightly trance, or breathed spell,
Inspires the pale-eyed priest from the prophetic cell.

Milton reverts to this theme in *Paradise Regained*, 1.455-61. Christ tells Satan :

No more shalt thou, by oracling, abuse
The Gentiles; henceforth oracles are ceased,
And thou no more, with pomp and sacrifice,
Shalt be inquired at Delphos, or elsewhere;
At least in vain, for they shall find thee mute.
God hath now sent His living oracle
Into the world to teach His final will;...

3. A basic distinction is to be made between determinism and predetermination. The first refers to "The doctrine that every event has a cause ... This is a purely metaphysical claim, and carries no implications for whether we can in principle predict the event" (Simon Blackburn, *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994, s.v.). Predetermination, on the other hand, is "the idea that events are fixed in advance". Hence "persons with psychic powers" are believed to be able to foresee and predict future events. (ibid., s.v.)
4. Trans. R.C. Jebb. Whether Oedipus hears Teiresias's last words or not is a separate question. If he hears, why does he not react immediately? Bernard Knox offers an explanation which is theatrically valid. He adds a stage direction, "Turning his (*sc.* Oedipus's) back on Tiresias, moving toward the palace" and comments :

There is of course no manuscript authority for this stage direction. But it seems to us that the logic of the situation demands it. The king has dismissed the prophet with contempt; why should he now listen to a long speech from him? And if he does stand still, listening to this long and terrifying prophecy, why does he make no reply? Why does he ask no questions? (He did before.) Worse still, how can the audience believe that he does not connect what Teiresias says with the prophecy that Apollo made to him at Delphi? Two scenes later he tells Jocasta about this prophecy (868-75) but speaks as if he has not heard what Tiresias said.

All these difficulties are resolved if he does not hear the crucial portion of Teiresias's speech (520-23) and by the time these lines are delivered he is almost through the doors. Teiresias, then, is delivering his tirade to an actor who goes off stage without hearing him; this is in fact a recognized convention of the Greek stage, where, menacing or mocking remarks, which in the dramatic situation must not be heard by their target, are often directed to the back of an actor on his way out. Teiresias is blind, but this need not mean that he does not know Oedipus is leaving; he can hear him – the acoustics of the Greek stage are extraordinary, as any visitor to Epidauros knows. For a full defense of this stage direction see "Sophocles, *Oedipus Tyrannos* 446: Exit Oedipus?" in *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 21.4 (1980) : 321-32.

Notes : *Oedipus the King* in Sophocles, *The Three Theban Plays*, trans. Robert

Fagles, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1984, pp. 408-09, on v. 507.

5. Such a mission, as it appears from *Oedipus at Colonus* (vv. 765ff), was not undertaken. Oedipus tells Creon: "In the old days – when, distempered by my self-wrought woes, I yearned to be cast out of the land – thy will went not with mine to grant the boon." Trans. Richard C. Jebb, *The Oedipus Coloneus*, Amsterdam: Servio-Publishers, 1963 (reprint of 1899 ed.), p. See also Jebb's introduction, p.x.
6. S.T. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, London: Dent & Sons, 1982, Chapter xiv, p.169.
7. "Masterful Treatment of a Model (Foreword to *Antigone*)", *Brecht on Theatre*, ed. and trans. John Willett, New Delhi: Radha Krishna Prakashan, 1979, p.210. Elsewhere Brecht says (referring specifically to *King Oedipus*):

Non-aristotelian drama would at all costs avoid bundling together the events portrayed and presenting them as an inexorable fate, to which the human being is handed over helpless despite the beauty and significance of his reactions; on the contrary, it is precisely this fate that it would study closely, showing it up as of human contriving.

"On the Use of Music in an Epic Theatre", *ibid.*, p.87.

8. *Ibid.*, p.212.
9. Brecht believes that "Greek dramaturgy uses certain forms of alienation, notably intervention by the Chorus...". *Ibid.*, p.210.
10. Herodotus, *The Histories*, trans. Aubrey de Selincourt, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1960, Book V, Ch. 63, p. 333. Aristotle also refers to this incident in his book on the

Constitution of Athens. Herodotus gives another instance of the corruption of the Pythoness in VI.66.

11. Bertrand Russell, *Power : A New Social Analysis*, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1938, pp. 53-54. Contrary to prevalent notions, the Greeks were notoriously addicted to bribes. As Russell says:

[T]here was almost no political morality [in Greece]. Herodotus states that no Spartan could resist a bribe. Throughout Greece, it was useless to object to a politician on the ground that he took bribes from the King of Persia, because his opponents also did so if they became sufficiently powerful to be worth buying. The result was a universal scramble for personal power, conducted by corruption, street fighting, and assassination. In this business the friends of Socrates and Plato were among the most unscrupulous. The final outcome, as might have been foreseen, was subjugation by foreign power... (pp.90-91).

12. Sigmund Freud opposed this view and wanted to replace it with his own concept of the Oedipus complex. See *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1976, p.363ff. For a criticism of Freud's view, see Knox (n4 above), pp.131-33.
13. *Goethe and His Age*, London: Merlin Press, [1968], pp. 180-81. Lukács quotes Hegel:

The particular has its own interest in world history; it is something finite and must perish as such. It is the particular which exhausts itself in struggle with its like and is partially destroyed. But from the struggle, from the destruction of the particular, the universal results.

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SHAKESPEARE'S CLEOPATRA : A REWORKING OF THE DIDO MYTH

Anasuya Guha

Virgil started working on his *Aeneid* almost ten years after the death of Cleopatra. In his *Georgics* he had already announced that his Latin epic was to revolve around the triumph at Actium :

In the midst I will have Caesar and he shall possess the shrine. In his honour I, a victor resplendent in Tyrian purple, will drive a hundred four-horse chariots beside the stream.

[*Georgics* 3.16-20]

However, when the first draft of the *Aeneid* was made public after Virgil's death in 19 B.C. the poem was seen to contain only a few brief references to Octavius. The battle of Actium was described in miniature as one of the scenes depicted on Aeneas's shield. Venus brings to a fatigued Aeneas the Vulcan-wrought armour containing proleptic depictions of famous wars that Rome would fight.

In the centre could be seen the bronze-plated fleets battling at Actium....On one side was Augustus Caesar leading Italians into battle. Having with him the Senate and populace opposing them was Antony; on his side was the wealth of the Orient and arms of varied design, and he came victoriously from the nations of the Down and the Red Sea's shore, followed — the shame of it! — by an Egyptian wife. The Queen in the centre called up her columns by sounding the tambourine of her lands; she had yet not thought of the pairs of asps which fate held in store for her.

(Bk. VIII 223)

Virgil does not tell the story of Antony and Cleopatra but recounts the tale of the rejection of an Eastern queen by a Roman male. Thus he not only manages to inflame Roman nationalist sentiment (Roman nationalism is conflated with assertions of Cleopatra as the 'other' in the lines : 'conquered peoples walked in their long line, as various in their dress and weapons as in their speech' (Bk. VIII 722-723), but also brings in a model of conduct for Cleopatra, a contemporary eastern queen and Antony, a contemporary Roman general. Dido here becomes a forerunner of Cleopatra and Aeneas's conduct throws into relief Antony's inglorious behaviour.

Shakespeare's Cleopatra seems to be a new Dido and Antony's passion for her a new threat to Roman civilization. Both Dido and Cleopatra are proud and powerful widows who succeed in enslaving important Roman soldiers in a web of luxury and voluptuousness. Like Cleopatra Dido, too, has been read variously as a paradigm of

chaste widowhood, the protagonist of a tragic tale as well as a Medea-like queen seducing Aeneas. Ultimately in both the tales stalwart Roman virtue as embodied in Aeneas and Antony is made to triumph. Dido's handmaidens prepare a purgation ritual, just as Cleopatra's maids help prepare her for the flamboyant finale; both queens receive kisses and solicitous ministrations from their companions, and recall the first meeting with their lovers.

Not only are there several thematic parallels between Dido's story and Cleopatra's but there are actual textual resonances from Virgil to be detected in *Antony and Cleopatra*. Shakespeare's queen exclaims :

...O, never was there queen
So mightly betray'd! ...Riotous madness,
To be entangled with those mouth-made vows,
Which break themselves in swearing! (I iii 24-31).

Dido, too, knows that Aeneas is preparing to leave even before he breaks the news to her :

Traitor, did you actually believe that you could disguise so wicked a deed and leave my country without a word? And can nothing hold you, not our love, nor our once plighted hands, nor even the cruel death that must await your Dido? (305-8)¹

R.S. Miola draws our attention to the *Heroides VIII* 73-87 : 'You are false in everything and I am not the first your tongue has deceived.'² There is another noticeable parallel between 'what' says the married woman you may go?/ Would she had never given you leave to come!' (A & C I iii 20-21) and the *Heroides VII*, 139 : 'But you are bid to go by your god! Ah, would he had forbidden you to come.'³ Shakespeare may have taken his cue from Virgil's descriptions of Dido in love ('And she would begin to speak her thoughts, but always cheer herself with the words half-spoken',⁴ IV 59-89) for Cleopatra's confusion in I iii 86-91 of *Antony and Cleopatra*.

...Courteous lord, one word;
Sir, you and I must part, but that's not it :
Sir, you and I have lov'd, but there's not it;
That you know well, something it is I would -
O, my oblivion is a very Antony,
And I am all forgotten.

However, there are important deviations in the Shakespearean text. Shakespeare at once reworks and rejects one of the most striking parallels to Cleopatra's tale, thereby displaying the freedom and flexibility of his imaginative maturity. Dido's farewell

concludes with a bitter and vengeful cry to the gods ;

But I still believe that if there is any power for righteousness in Heaven, you will drink to the dregs the cup of punishment among sea-rocks, and as you suffer cry 'Dido' again and again....you will have your punishment, you villain.'⁵ (IV 382)

But Shakespeare's queen exhorts gods to protect Antony and wishes him success and honour :

...be deaf to my unpitied folly,
And all the gods go with you! Upon your sword
Sit level victory, and smooth success
Be strew'd before your feet!' (I iii 98-101)

Cleopatra's end is spectacular, with the queen falling asleep gradually, issuing sexual invitations to Antony - it is a continuation as well as climax of the languorous sensuality that she has throughout displayed. Dido's end is neither as seductive nor as gorgeous, but incorporates all the heroic savagery typical of epics. Antony visualises a reunion with Cleopatra in a transmuted image of Aeneas and Dido in the Elysian fields.

Where souls do couch on flowers, we'll hand in hand,
And with our sprightly port make the ghosts gaze :
Dido, and her Aeneas, shall want troops,
And all the haunt be ours. (A & C IV xiv 50-54).

This is a faulty reading of the Virgilian scene where the spirit of Dido actually turns disdainfully from Aeneas to Sychaeus, and may be deliberate on Shakespeare's part since he sees very little that is reprehensible in a total commitment to love. Shakespeare 'reformulates the Roman ideal of public duty by emphasising Aeneas' commitment to Dido over his duty to war,'⁶ observes Jyotsna Singh.

The stories of both Dido and Cleopatra revolve round the conflict between love and empire; in each the proponents of empire associated love with effeminacy while total commitment to the values of love necessitates death. But here the affinities end. In *Antony and Cleopatra* the conflict between love and duty is largely resolved as Shakespeare's Antony decides in favour of love, spurning the Roman code of conduct. That is why Cleopatra's impassioned raptures ('I dreamt there was an Emperor Antony, /...His legs bestride the ocean, his rear'd arm / Crested the world' V ii 76) replace Dido's grim diatribe : 'And from my dead bones may some Avenger rise to persecute with fire and sword those settlers from Troy'⁷ (*Aeneid* IV 606-57). Again Antony's transformation from 'guest' to 'husband' ('Husband, I come' : A & C V ii 286) reverses Aeneas' fall from the status of 'husband' to 'guest' : 'hospes/hoc sobum nomen quonian de coninge restal,'⁸ *Aeneid* IV 323-4 ('Guest? I used to call you Husband but the word has shrunk to guest.').

In the *Aeneid* the founding of Rome is seen as the establishment of the rule of law and reason over passion and the irrational. From the standpoint of patriarchy the continuation of civilization itself depends on the victory of reason over passion. Aeneas's rejection of Dido for the sake of his marriage with Lavinia, where passion has no role to play, seemed necessary to Virgil for the forward march of civilization. In the *Aeneid* Bk. IV 1.347, Aeneas says : 'hic amor, haec patria est'⁹ ('There is my love, there my homeland'). Dido poses a threat to the Roman code of conduct since implicit in her infatuation is the neglect of public affairs as well as of the values of civilization.

But in the Virgilian representation of the Dido tale there seems to be something more than this concern for patriarchy. The Latin poet was also providing Augustan Rome with a myth which, while defining and sanctioning the Roman values, contrasts them with everything that Dido stood for. In Aeneas Virgil presents a hero who knows that private emotions must be deplored and harshly repressed. This is the ethic against which Antony and Cleopatra have transgressed most conspicuously. Loyalty to one's father and one's motherland, self-denial and obedience are the ideals to which Aeneas owes allegiance, and they obviously appear to the greatest dramatic effect in the episode in which he repudiates the temptation offered by the love of an African queen epitomising the 'Other.' Said points out that

European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self.¹⁰

He adds :

[the] Oriental world emerged, first according to general ideas about who or what was Oriental, then according to a detailed logic not governed simply, by empirical reality but by a battery of desires, repressions, investments and projections.¹¹

Shakespeare's vision of Roman history differs from Virgil's who saw Actium as a climactic triumph over the forces of anarchy and barbarism and as the beginning of the hallowed Pax Augusta. Shakespeare, less assured of Augustan ideals, is more ambivalent. With a vision unclouded by political considerations, he sees in Octavius' victory not simply an apocalyptic triumph nor in the overthrow of Antony merely a much-desired purging. Hence the reversal of Roman values by Antony as Shakespeare refashions in the play what Barbara J. Bono calls : 'Virgil's great fiction of erotic abnegation...'¹² In Virgilian terms Cleopatra would be Dido, Circe, Juno and Amater, problematizing the march of Roman history, but in the Shakespearean version she becomes Lavinia, the Roman bride.

Philo's reading of the lovers in *Antony and Cleopatra* is structured upon centuries of orthodox interpretation of the *Aeneid* and of Roman patriarchal values. But Shakespeare also posits a fresh set of values, which appear as an alternative, though not a necessary

substitute, for the fragile, ephemeral and spatial values upheld by the *Aeneid*. The values posited in *Antony and Cleopatra* are non-temporal and non-spatial; the lovers create their own ahistorical time and place as Antony declares : 'Here is my space.' (I i 34).

Michal Foucault points out in *The History of Sexuality* :

Power prescribes an 'order' for sex that operates at the same time as a form of intelligibility : sex is to be deciphered on the basis of its relation to the law.¹³

Thus both Dido and Cleopatra who threaten the patriarchy are also its victims — Dido more obviously than Cleopatra. In Aeneas the conflict resolves in favour of honour. Dido's tale provides a paradigm sanctioning Roman values, while Cleopatra and Antony, who spurn the Roman Code in favour of love, receive castigation.

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RABINDRANATH TAGORE'S *RED OLEANDERS* AND WILLIAM BLAKE

Madhumita Mukherjee Ghosh

The two poets lived thousands of miles and a century apart. One belonged to a poor family, the eldest son of a hosier in London. The other hailed from a blue-blooded family in India, the youngest son of a wealthy cultured illustrious father. Yet they had a lot in common. Both William Blake (1757-1827) and Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) were multi-faceted artists who not only wrote in verse and prose but were well-known painters too. They were 'myriad-minded' men who shared a common platform; they lived and wrote during the two most crucial periods in world history. While the late eighteenth century saw one of the greatest revolutions till date and the rise of industrialism and capitalism, identified early by the visionary Blake as a terrifying future threat to humanity, the era in which Tagore lived witnessed the steep ascent of capitalism and mechanization, the staggering fall of humanity into its clutches, and two world wars. The two sensitive minds reacted to their environment in much the same way, voicing their alarm and disapproval in their writings and drawings, their creative output in general being a critique of contemporary global society. The poets did not confine themselves to their country and nation but expressed grave concern for the future of humanity. They were essentially Romantic poets. Imagination, the most significant feature of Romanticism, particularly in its utopian revolutionary spirit, seems to occupy the foremost position in the ideology of both Blake and Tagore.

William Blake was ignored in his age by fellow-poets and contemporary critics. He was first 'discovered' as a genius in as late as the twentieth century with the publication of a substantial edition of his work by E.J.Ellis and W.B. Yeats. While Tagore's admiration of the English romantic poets, particularly Wordsworth, Shelley and Keats, is known to all today, there seems to be hardly any Tagore critic who mentions Blake with reference to Tagore. Yeats was the first to compare Tagore to Blake in his introduction to the English *Gitanjali*. Tagore himself seems to have mentioned Blake nowhere. But that he had read Blake and admired the English visionary poet's creative genius is clear from his essay 'Religion of an Artist' (a lecture delivered at the University of Dacca in 1926).¹ Speaking of poetry as being 'a creation of a uniquely personal and yet universal character', Tagore quotes a poem of Blake as an illustration for his argument. It is interesting to note here that Tagore quotes not from a well-known poem of Blake but from a lesser known fragment from his Notebook, 'Never seek to tell thy love', preferring the deleted word 'seek' to Blake's final choice 'pain'.² Long before Derrida wrote *Of Grammatology* (1997), in his lecture Tagore seems to have adopted a post-structuralist view of reading a poem: 'directly a poem is fashioned, it is eternally freed from its genesis, it minimizes its history and emphasizes its independence.' He finds Blake's poem a perfect specimen of poetic unity: 'It has its grammar, its vocabulary. When we divide them part by part....

the poem which is *one* departs like the gentle wind... The poem is a creation, which is something more than an idea, inevitably conquers our attention; and any meaning which we feel in its words is like the feeling in a beautiful face of a smile that is inscrutable, elusive and profoundly satisfactory.'

Born in colonized India, more than hundred years after William Blake, Rabindranath Tagore shared an affinity with the English poet in more ways than the obvious—that both were painter-poets. There have been poets who also painted occasionally, painters who also produced literary works, as well as poets who wrote in picturesque vivid language. But Blake and Tagore remain till date unique as artists who simultaneously pursued both arts with equal passion and acclaim. Both of them wrote in verse and prose, singing simple songs containing, however, serious thoughts which developed into a rich philosophical system in their works. Tagore's *Shishu* and *Shishu Bholanath* are comparable to Blake's *Songs of Innocence* in their portrayal of the world of innocence, while his satires like *Tasher Desh* and *Achalayatan* may be studied parallel with Blake's *An Island in the Moon* and *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* as Menippean satires. A rich and extensive use of symbolism characterizes both poets. Tagore was widely read in Western literature and speaks of his inspiration from Wordsworth and Shelley. Though his Nature poetry exudes the same Wordsworthian charm of simplicity and innocence, and his lectures and *swadeshi* poems strike an occasional Shelleyan chord, his entire creative output reveals a mind with greater semblance to Blake than to anybody else. In his preoccupation with Innocence, his faith in the human imagination divine, in his mysticism, in his visionary qualities, and above all, in his concern for man's well-being, he seems to be taking up from where Blake had left off a hundred years earlier. Blake was a revolutionary with very personal, but at times eccentric, and exclusive opinions of his own. But he was outspoken and forthright in his conviction that man alone could save man from the doom he has inflicted upon himself in the name of creating an industrialized and scientific society. Rabindranath Tagore, in his writings, spoke of *Viswamanav*, the eternal, elemental man whose identity was at stake in the modern materialistic utilitarian world. What binds these two minds together is their painful awareness of the 'real', while guiding man to the ideal.

A comparative study of Tagore's *Red Oleanders* and Blake's prophetic poems *The Book of Thel* and *The Visions of the Daughters of Albion* may provide insight into the two poets' response to the crises faced by man, and their treatment of these crises. The narratives in Tagore's play and Blake's poems are, of course, different, but we may begin with the protagonists of the works as a take-off point. Thel is Blake's delicate, beautiful heroine who dwells in the world of unmitigated innocence. It is true that at the end of the poem she sees 'the secrets of land unknown' and frightened, flees back to her home with a shriek. But in *Visions* we find a mature version of Thel in Oothoon who, retaining her spirit of innocence, has encountered experience and emerges unchanged.

Nandini, the principal female character in *Red Oleanders*, is a beautiful, charming innocent girl who discovers the world of experience in the course of the play, but rather than being disillusioned and defeated, emerges victorious, helping all around her to be reborn.

In the commentary on his play, *Raktakarabi*, Tagore has advised his readers not to attempt any exegesis on his work, simply stating that it is the story of Nandini. He denies that it is a symbolic play, though explaining in his commentary on the later English version named *Red Oleanders* (1925) that it is a tirade against industrialism. In his letter to the American radical Upton Sinclair, in September 1923, commenting on Sinclair's book *The Brass Check*, Tagore reveals his repugnance for commercialism and the dehumanizing effects of machines which is the theme of the American novelist's book. He speaks of 'the humiliation that worship of money brings, its stifling quality, its empty arrogance, its insidious undermining of self-respect, its valuelessness, all the attributes which are its curse when dollars own the man;...For years I have thought over these things, this especial phase of our modern civilisation, and only a few weeks ago I have myself finished a drama on the same subject.'³ During the summer of 1923, while staying in Shillong, he wrote *Yakshapuri*, the first version of the final *Raktakarabi* (*Red Oleanders*). The change in the title of the play from *Yakshapuri* to *Nandini* to *Raktakarabi*, however, indicates that it is indeed a symbolic play. Nandini's 'red oleanders' are a symbol of the spirit of joy and beauty. Blake's Thel stands for incomplete innocence while Oothoon signifies the mature woman's response to exploitation. Nandini, in her journey from innocence to experience, embodies the development of innocent Thel to a mature Oothoon.

Thel, the shepherdess, the youngest daughter of Mne Seraphim, lived in the sunny vales of Har before rejecting the sun to set forth in search of the mortal world. Not only is she unaware of sorrow, she is dissatisfied with her easy life. She wishes to know how to lead a meaningful life and questions non-human creatures, a Lilly (a virgin), a cloud (a lover), and a clod of clay (a matron), each of which preaches the unity of life, the integration of one another's 'use' into a life cycle. She complains to them: 'Without a use this shining woman lived/Or did she only live to be at death the food of worms?' Tagore seems to take off from this complaint of Thel's. Very early in life Tagore concerned himself with the philosophy of selflessness as being the basis of the religion of man. In 1883 he had written an essay 'Religion' in *Bharati*, where as an illustration to his theory of the religion of the world, he says: 'The primary religion of the world is beneficence. Selfishness is against the religion of the world. Hence there is no one selfish in this world. One has to work for others whether one wills or not. Every atom in this world is for the one next to it or near to it.'⁴ Nandini does not belong to the utilitarian world of *Yakshapuri*. She had enjoyed a blissful life with her lover Ranjan, ferrying across the stormy waters with him, watching him frolicking joyously in the river Nagai, she hails from a rural home and, before being brought to *Yakshapuri* riding with him in the woods,

applauding him when he shot an arrow between the eyebrows of the tiger on the spring. In Yakshapuri she asks the characters she meets — the professor, Gokul - 'What need have you of me?' She apparently serves no purpose in the kingdom of dead wealth and that, Tagore suggests, is the purpose of her summons from her rural homeland. She challenges the lives of all she encounters by apparently doing nothing. 'She does nothing, that's the rub. I don't understand the way she goes on,' Gokul admits to Bishu.

Red Oleanders is about the overthrowing of a system that is governed by material wealth used exploitatively and purposefully by the power-wielding fathers of society. Nandini's role in this society is to disenchant the wealth-hungry, power-hungry out of their passive stupor and charm them to the world of joy and energy. Nandini's spirit is of dynamic energy posited against the acquiescence of the professor, the Governor, the Gossain, the Antiquarian, the King and minor characters like Gokul and Chandra. To Blake, an advocate of energy as being the basis of creative life, dynamic energy, at its most elemental form, is sexual energy and completeness of man lies in healthy total sexuality. Judged from this premise Tagore's Nandini seems to score above Blake's Thel. Nandini does not shy away from sexuality as Thel does.

The sexual undertones and overtones in the two works cannot be overlooked. The title-page of *The Book of Thel* shows a young woman, probably Thel, looking on at a couple, the male arising directly out of a flower and the woman, partially away, from another flower.⁵ It seems an interesting coincidence that the flowers painted by Blake are red and the leaves on the accompanying stalks are pointed like those of an oleander tree. The male, in Blake's drawing, is nude, - nakedness symbolizing for Blake primal energy-, reaching out his arms to embrace the woman who throws up her hands probably in dismay. She is, however, clothed, suggesting opacity of vision. She is again Thel, - the illustration thus shows an objective and distanced observation of Thel's encounters in the world of experience by herself. This objectivity is found in the text of the poem as well where Thel refers to herself by her name rather than using the first person pronoun. Flowers, conventionally, are a symbol of sex and passion, and the illustration clearly tells us that the story narrated is about concerns that are sexual. Thel, the name probably derived from the Greek *thelos* — 'will' or *thelus* — 'female' or the Hebrew *thal* meaning dew, then signifies a delicate woman with a closed view of selfhood in her unwillingness to partake in the sexual acts of union, marriage, procreation and nursing, pictures of which are presented by the non-human creatures she meets.

Neither for Blake nor for Tagore, however, does female sexuality stand for the erotic. While Blake speaks of sexuality as the basic, elemental form of dynamic energy leading to creation, for Tagore it is the woman's *shakti*, the 'joy-giving power of woman as the Beloved' that 'infuse(s) life into all the aspirations of man.' 'This ineffable emanation of woman's nature has', Tagore says, '...played its part in the creations of man, unobtrusively but inevitably. Had man's mind not been energised by the inner working of woman's vital charm, he would never have attained his successes.' Tagore goes on to elaborate on

woman's vital charm, the basis of man's spiritual civilization, as being 'a combination of several qualities, -- patience, self-abnegation, sensitive intelligence, grace in thought, word and behaviour, -- the reticent expression of rhythmic life, the tenderness and terribleness of love; at its core, moreover, is that self-radiant Spirit of Delight which ever gives itself up.'⁶ This is Nandini, an embodiment of woman's *shakti*. She exudes an aggressive femininity which affects all she comes in contact with. She seems to jolt them out of their passivity through her innate female sexuality, no character in the play being able to be indifferent to her 'vital charm'. Kishor insists that she accept the red flowers every morning from him alone. Bishu, her partner in music, eventually sacrifices his life for associating with Nandini and her dissenting ways. The fathers of society, the Governor, Gossain, the professor, each representing the different institutions, are all disturbed by her presence. Chandra, the only other female character in the play, is only too aware of the threat she holds - Nandini's beauty and her ways make her 'sick'. She seems to echo the feelings of Blake's nurse in *Songs of Experience* who, envious of the young lovers 'whispering in the dale', calls them back home in the evening probably because she can no longer partake of the joys of love. The nurse's husband or lover is non-existent and Chandra, married to Phagulal, one of 'tunnel-diggers' in Yakshapuri, is possessed by the lust for wealth.

Oothoon is an extension of Thel. *The Book of Thel* ends with Thel, frightened at the visions of sensuality and mortality, fleeing back to the vales or Har. The Argument of *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* presents Oothoon trembling in 'virgin fears' as she 'rose up from the vale'. In the poem we find her wandering woefully like Thel, her first encounter being like Thel's, with a flower. The Marygold preaches to Oothoon the same lesson of selflessness as did the Lilly to Thel but Oothoon's response is different and she plucks the flower, suggesting her willingness to be initiated into the mature world of experience. It is interesting to note that both Blake's poems and Tagore's play begin with the principal female characters' association with flowers. Blake's spelling of 'Marygold' seems to suggest both a human image in Mary, and in 'gold' probably the myth of Aeneas plucking the golden bough as a gift for Proserpina when he descended to the underworld. Thel visits the underworld at the Clod's request and Tagore's *Red Oleanders* is about the dead wealth buried in the underworld, relentlessly delved into by the tunnel-diggers. Flowers being conventionally a symbol of sex, by plucking the Marygold Oothoon seems to be ready for the world of sexuality.⁷ Nandini accepts the red flowers from Kishor; they are a symbol to her of Ranjan, her love. She wears them in her hair, round her neck, on her wrists, thus accentuating her beauty, and her sexuality; in her alliance with Ranjan she embodies the primal energy that motivates sex. Each wants a flower from her ornaments suggesting their willingness to surrender to her sexual charm. Gokul voices their predicament when he tells her, 'You know some spell, I'm sure. You're snaring everybody here. You're a witch! Those who are bewitched by your beauty will come to their death.' Towards the end of *Visions* Oothoon tells Urizen that she is determined to

spread 'silken nets and traps of adamant' to 'catch for thee girls of mild silver or of furious gold', thus freeing them from the bonds of restraint and kindling the spirit of love in them. She advocates free love : 'I cry Love! Love! Love! Happy happy Love! Free as the mountain wind!' Nandini sings to the King on two occasions : "I love, I love" is the cry that breaks out from/ The bosom of earth and water.'

Nandini is, like Oothoon, torn between two males, one representing love and passion, the other strength and physical energy. While she rejoices in the youthful energy of Ranjan, she is awed by the strength of the King's arms in amassing the gold nuggets. The King is drawn to the female sexuality in Nandini and there are clear hints of physical union in his stroking her hand, burying his hands in her hair, in his wish to break her into pieces and again in his desperation in driving her away, for his ardent desire is to crush her with his hands as one crushes grapes to extract juice. These images suggest the King's aroused libido but the King is not Blake's Bromion. He does not rape her as Bromion rapes Oothoon to increase her market value as a slave by impregnating her.⁸ Rather, in a reversal of situation, the human worth of the King is increased by Nandini who finally succeeds in liberating the King from his self-created prison. After her rape, Oothoon calls out to Theotormon, her lover, but 'Theotormon hears me not'. Rejected she laments, she turns to Bromion for none but Bromion can hear her lamentations. Even while waiting for Ranjan, Nandini repeatedly approaches the King to call him out into the open and not only gives in to his sexual advances but also admits to Bishu candidly, 'I liked it'.

The King seems to be an embodiment of Bromion and Urizen rolled into one. Urizen, the central character in Blake's prophetic books, stands for cold reason, the eighteenth century rationality seen by Blake as being instrumental in binding and restraining man. He is seen as an elderly bearded figure, blind, bound by fetters with heavy brass-bound books and an iron pen, evil in his despotic commands. In her speech to Urizen, Oothoon addresses the jealous, infernal god as 'Creator of Men! mistaken Demon of Heaven.' The King in *Red Oleanders* is entrapped in his self-created prison, languishing in the dark in an inert passive pleasure behind the nettings. He is half-man, half-demon, possessing immense strength and steeped in crude materiality. His face is never seen and the only visible part of his body is his hand, a symbol of command of execution, which frightens his subjects. The King seems to assume Urizenic proportions when Nandini accuses him of rending the bosom of the earth and bringing up together with the booty 'the curse of its dark demon, blind and hard, cruel and envious.' His powerful urge to know and understand everything, from Nandini to her red oleanders, is a Urizenic desire, the passion of reason. When Nandini speaks to him of Ranjan and arouses his jealousy, and acknowledges quite unashamedly how she is drawn to both of them, she is suggesting what Oothoon tells Urizen : 'Thy joys are tears! thy labour vain, to form men to thy image./ How can one joy absorb another? Are not different joys/ Holy, eternal, infinite? And each joy is a love.' In trying to bring the two loves, or two modes of creativity

together, in trying to open confined, limited reason or science to the entirety of nature, in the call of autumn, Nandini is seeking the coalescence of the Blakean 'four zoas' as a wholesome civilizational principle.

To Blake, Urizen, the father god is one of the Eternals or the Immortals, the unfallen Man until he is banished to the 'obscure, shadowy void' to lead a solitary life. Dividing, partitioning, dropping his plummet line, Urizen is an architect of the skeletal abstractions he calls science. Tagore calls his play 'a tirade against industrialism'. His King resides alone in a dark, dead, vacant world. In his dominion the tunnel-diggers, who were once farmers in their idyllic rural homeland, relentlessly raise gold-nuggets from the underworld. They are not only reduced to dehumanized numbers but the less fortunate ones like Anup and Upamanyu, once tall robust young men, are reduced to abstractions, 'the King's leavings' as they are called, beings sucked out of their 'flesh and marrow, life and soul.' When Nandini, aghast, wishes to know how they have lost it all, the Governor commands the Antiquarian, who is also called the man of science, to 'explain it if you can.' The King in *Red Oleanders*, in his Urizenic exile, realizes the inadequacy and futility of his power, and whether with the frog or with Nandini, he seeks the principle of life, which seems to have been crushed by the dead weight of industrial lust, the lust for accumulation, projected in so many powerful images in *Red Oleanders*. 'These dark satanic mills', as Blake describes them in *Milton*, could be a perfect substitute for Yakshapuri, where we see youth crushed, warped and squeezed dry while the vistas of autumn pastures, rich with crops, envision Blake's new Jerusalem 'In England's green and pleasant land.'

William Blake began with the concerns of England and her men. He went on to explore Europe, America, Asia, Africa and finally the soul of man, for the history of the individual is but a scaled-down version of the history of the universe. His thoughts culminate in *The Four Zoas*, his magnum opus in which he narrates the story of the fall of the Eternal Man and his redemption. Man, now fallen into disunity may only be redeemed if the 'four mighty ones' in him – Reason, Wisdom, Love and Imagination – are reunited in harmony. *The Four Zoas* ends with a picture of bliss, a mood of unqualified serenity in an ideal environment promising an ideal world where the four zoas are united and man is reborn. At the end of *Red Oleanders* the King and all his men are reborn when eternal love and beauty in Nandini are united with the eternal energy and passion in Ranjan, the other half of her self, and with the elemental eternal strength in the King. *The Four Zoas* ends with a picture of bliss, in a mood of unqualified serenity, an ideal environment in an ideal world that Blake prophesies:

'The sun arises from his dewy bed & fresh airs
 Play in his smiling beams giving the seeds of life to grow,
 And the fresh Earth beams forth ten thousand thousand springs of life' – when
 'The war of swords departed now
 The dark Religions are departed and sweet science reigns.'

'Sweet science' is Reason (scientia), restored to its essential sweetness, drawing on emotion, imagination and passion. The last plate of the epic shows a joyous figure dancing on top of the world. *Red Oleanders* ends with a similar picture of well-being, the Reason embodied by the King uniting with the love and beauty in Nandini, and with imagination and passion in Ranjan, who, though dead, emerges victorious, leaving 'behind him in death his conquering call. He will live again, he cannot die.' The play closes with the victory of Nandini who leads the King to his salvation, leaving her gift of red oleanders for all and the autumn song of harvest in the background:

'Hark it's autumn calling, –
Come, O come away!
The earth's mantle of dust is filled with ripe corn!
O the joy! The joy!

Blake wrote a prose essay in 1804, *A Vision of the Last Judgement*, the title, however, being supplied by D.G. Rossetti when he transcribed the essay for Alexander Gilchrist's *Life of William Blake*, 1863.⁹ The essay may be seen as Blake's summing up of his entire work and philosophy, the characters in the painting and the expository essay no longer appearing as personages of Blake's pantheon, but characters from the Bible and the States of the Human Mind. The conception of the Last Judgement appealed to Blake, both as an artist and a mystic because he believed that error must define itself before it could be cast out, and evil must take shape to be identified and transformed into good. Blake believed in progression through contraries and thus at the end of his career, in the midst of all the evil in society and the universe, he cherished the comforting thought that an essential development was taking place whereby Albion, England, will be united and thus identified with Jerusalem, or Blake's Eden – the ideal, perfect world. The work is Blake's final statement on the war between Imagination and Reason.

While in Munich, in 1930, Tagore wrote a long prose-poem *The Child*, inspired by a passion-play enacting the birth of Christ that he had seen in the village of Oberammergau. Published the following year in London, this is his only major poem written originally in English, later translated into Bengali as 'Sishutirtha' in 1932, and included in *Punascha*. The poem, epical in its grand style, proclaims Tagore's ultimate faith in man. A few months after the composition of the poem, in December 1930, Tagore said in a lecture delivered in New York: 'The babe who was born centuries ago, brought exaltation to man. Not machinery, not associations, not organizations, but a human babe, and people were amazed. And when all the machinery will be rusted, he will live.'¹⁰ A few months after 'Sishutirtha' was published in the monthly magazine *Bichitra*, Tagore wrote in a commentary on the poem on the dual nature of man, the bestial and the divine. The beast

in him rules when he is possessed by greed for material gains, pride in power and delirious obsession with reason and intellect, causing a threat to humanity. Salvation comes to man in this crisis in the form of the eternal man – ‘sanatan manab’ – who is reborn again and again.¹¹ *The Child* begins:

‘What of the night?’ they ask.

No answer comes.

For the blind Time gropes in a maze and knows not its path or purpose.

The darkness in the valley stares like the dead eye-sockets of a giant,
the clouds like a nightmare oppress the sky,

and the massive shadows lie scattered like the torn limbs of the night.

Like Blake, Tagore believed in a future golden age when the ‘mahamanab’ will be born, a distant future when man will have conquered his animal nature. *The Child* ends with the mother sitting on a straw bed with the newborn babe on her lap and the pilgrims hailing – ‘Victory to Man, the new-born, the ever-living.’ The mother is Mother Earth, and the babe is the Eternal Man, the saviour of mankind. For Tagore too believed, as did Blake, that man alone could save man.

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6. ‘The Indian Ideal of Marriage’, ed. Sisir K. Das, op.cit. pp.535-36.
7. Johnson and Grant, op.cit. p.72n₃.
8. Ibid., p.73n₂.
9. Keynes ed., op.cit: ‘Notes’ on *A Vision of the Last Judgement*, p.916.
10. Lecture delivered at New York on December 1, 1930, published in *The Modern Review*, July 1931, p.48, quoted in *Rabindra Rachanabali*, Viswabharati, 1986, Vol.viii, p.712.
11. Commentary on *Sishutirtha* published in *Bichitra*, Ashwin 1338 B.S. pp.285-86, extract reproduced in *R.R.* Vol. viii, pp.712-13.



GOURMONT AND ELIOT AT THE CROSSROADS :

A NOTE

Chinmoy Guha

We shall not even begin to appreciate T S Eliot's 'new' critical discourse in the second decade of the last century, if we fail to recognize his creative responses to Remy de Gourmont (1858-1915), the great apologist for Symbolism. Although their names have been linked in passing, ever since Eliot paid homage to the Frenchman in *The Sacred Wood*, not a single commentator has dared to state the obvious: Eliot hijacked from him the *stance* that the poet-reader must take in relation to the poetic text, which helped him to formulate 'some kind of a theory' and played a dominant role in the development of his taste and sensibility at a turning point in history.

For Eliot, Gourmont's entire attitude to the text and the mechanism of creative intelligence embodied the contemporary spirit. To read him was like passing from one phase of civilisation to another, because he seemed to 'combine to a remarkable degree sensitiveness, erudition, sense of fact, sense of history and generalizing power' (SW, p.14). Gourmont was probably as important to Eliot as Jules Laforgue was in his formative years. In Eliot's words:

At that time, I was much stimulated and much helped by the critical writings of Remy de Gourmont. I acknowledge that influence and am grateful for it; and I by no means disown it by having passed on to another problem not touched upon in this book, that of the relation of poetry to the spiritual and social life of its time and of other times.

(Preface to the 1928 edition, SW, p.viii)

Eliot, who believed that 'surprisingly few things can be said about poetry; and of these few, the most turn out to be either false or to say nothing of significance' (*The Criterion*, October 1923, p.153), nevertheless found acceptable, if controversial, formulas for crucial matters of poetry. In those early years of Prufrockian unsureness, Eliot badly needed someone of the temperament and conviction of Gourmont to bolster his confidence.

Remy de Gourmont, who had to fight against the received idea that Symbolist poetry was obscure and decadent, sought to get rid of the emotional dust by combining artistic

sensitivity with scientific objectivity. Consequently, like Eliot, he transformed his personal impressions into iron laws.

A master polemicist, a 'real master of facts' and 'master illusionist of facts' (SE, p. 32), according to his immediate needs, he adopted a peculiar aggressiveness, an air of almost disdainful superiority, which made him a high-brow iconoclast. In *La Culture des idées* (1900), Gourmont quoted Swift and advised young writers to censure praise (for, in his opinion, destructive criticism was more useful for stealing the limelight) and belong to a coterie:

Quelle que soit votre force, vos armes et votre insolence, vous aurez besoin de faire partie d'un cénacle ou d'une coterie, comme on a besoin d'un cercle ou d'un café.

(Whatever may be your power, your arms and your insolence, you are required to belong to a group or a coterie, just as one requires a circle or a café.

(*La Culture des idées*, p. 255)

There is a good deal of pontifical solemnity in Gourmont's style (he declared : 'It is always good to pretend', p. 257), which was readily imbibed by Eliot. It would be interesting to remember that Middleton Murry, who praised Eliot's 'critical intelligence of a high order and sensibility of an unusual kind', with the same time breath criticized his manner as 'often portentous and disdainful'². What Gourmont, and subsequently Eliot, wanted was to 'sow the seeds of doubt' ('semer des doutes') for 'doubt is liberating' ('le doute est libérateur', *Le Problème du style*, p. 162). Hence, 'the occasional note of arrogance, of vehemence, of cocksureness, of rudeness, the braggadocio of the mild-mannered man' (TCC, p.14).

I wish to briefly catalogue from Gourmont's books some of the epoch-making ideas which seem to have a direct bearing on Eliot's role as poet and critic.

Gourmont's view on originality :

L'invention des thèmes n'a pas un grand intéêt en littérature. ...M.de Maupassant, qui inventa la plupart de ses thèmes, est un moindre conteur que Boccacce, qui n'inventa aucun des siens. L'invention des sujets est d'ailleurs limitée, encore que *flexible à l'infini*

(Invention of themes does not have much importance in literature ... M. de Maupassant who invented most of his themes, is a lesser storyteller than Boccaccio, who invented nothing. Moreover, invention of subjects is limited in scope, and has *no great flexibility...*) (*La Culture des idées*, pp.14-15)

According to Gourmont, 'Le génie est affaire d'apprentissage'. ('Genius is a matter of apprenticeship'). This seems to anticipate Eliot's hasty declaration : 'The poem which is absolutely original is absolutely bad' (SPEP, p.x). The following excerpts from Gourmont's essays should show how much he influenced Eliot's method of work.

On Imitation :

L'imitation des écrivains les uns par les autres, de ceux qui ne sont plus par ceux qui vont être, est *un fait nécessaire* ...

Pour un adolescent, — il y a des adolescences prolongées — admirer, c'est imiter. Les deux actes se rejoignent fatalement. La période imitatrice de la carrière est intéressante historiquement ...

(Imitation of dead writers, by those who want to become writers, is *a necessity*.)

For an adolescent — and there are prolonged adolescences — to admire is to imitate. The two acts join fatally. This period of imitation in a poet's career has a historic interest.)

(*Le Problème du style*, p. 109)

On Plagiarism :

Il y a des plagiaires innocents. La mémoire ... n'est pas autre chose qu'une bibliothèque de clichés sensoriels; les uns sont vifs, les autres altérés ou effacés ... Le souvenir prend la forme de l'inspiration.

(There are innocent plagiarists. Memory ... is nothing but a library of sensorial clichés; some are lovely, others mutilated or erased ... Memory takes the form of inspiration....)

(*Le Problème du style*, p. 142).

Il est permis d'imiter, il est permis d'emprunter des documents, d'assimiler des idées. De grands poètes, Corneille, Molière, Racine, Victor Hugo, n'ont pas dédaigné l'emprunt et même ils ne l'ont pas toujours dissimulé. Balzac avant de trouver dans le réalisme sa voie, imita les romans anglais. Alexandre Dumas alla plus loin; ses premiers drames sont faits de pièces et de morceaux pris à droite et à gauche, cousus avec une suprême adresse.

(One is permitted to imitate, one is permitted to borrow documents, assimilate ideas Great poets like Corneille, Molière, Racine, Victor Hugo have not disdained borrowing and have not even tried to conceal it. Before finding his true path in realism, Balzac imitated English novels. Alexandre Dumas went even further; his first plays were forged out of bits and fragments taken from here and there, but woven together with supreme skill.)

(Ibid., p. 306)

There could be factual fallibility in some of these arguments (F.W. Bateson complained of 'factual fallibility' in Eliot)³, but the conviction and purposefulness of neither Eliot nor Gourmont is ever in doubt. Besides, this view could well have provided Eliot with the *raison d'être* for his ingenious method of freely using others' material in his creative and critical works.

On the use of common speech :

....les plus belles images, les plus vraies et les plus hardies, sont encloses dans nos mots de *tous les jours*.

(..... the most beautiful images, the truest and the most daring are enclosed in our *everyday* words.)

(*La Culture des idées*, p. 43)

This is, of course, one of Eliot's basic premises. Few commentators of Eliot have pointed out to us that Gourmont was a great advocate of common speech in poetry.

On poetry which is difficult :

La clarté n'est pas une qualité essentielle de la poésie; il est même dangereux pour un poète d'être trop clair et de laisser trop bien voir le fond, généralement assez pauvre, de sa pensée.

(Clarity is not an essential quality of poetry. It is even dangerous for a poet to be too clear and let others discover the depth, generally quite poor, of his thought.)

(*Le Problème du style*, p.162)

Eliot's own poetry would testify to this. This reminds us of his famous statement, which would have been in the manifesto of the Modernists :

Poets in our civilisation must be difficult. The poet must be more and more indirect, in order to force, to dislocate if necessary, language into his meaning. (SE, p. 289)

On Style :

Le style est un produit physiologique et l'un des plus constants, quoique dans la dépendance des diverses fonctions vitales.

(The style is a physiological product and one of the most constant, although it depends on various vital functions.)

(*Le Problème du style*, p. 190)

Toute sensation actuelle ou emmagasinée dans les cellules nerveuses est propice à l'art.

(Every sensation current or stored up in the nerve cells is proper to art.)

(Ibid., p. 53)

Eliot seems to have merely paraphrased him when he wrote : 'One must look into the cerebral cortex, the nervous system and the digestive tracts,' (SE, p. 290). And this view seems to be closely related to Eliot's theory of the sensuous apprehension of thought or of the recreation of thought into feeling.

On Sensibility :

La sensibilité comprend la raison elle-même, qui n'est que de la sensibilité cristallisée.

(Sensibility comprises reason itself, which is nothing but sensibility crystallised). (*Le Problème du style*, p. 107).

A force de vivre, on acquiert la faculté de dissocier son intelligence de sa sensibilité : cela arrive ou tard, par l'acquisition d'une faculté nouvelle, indispensable quoique dangereuse, le scepticisme. Laforgue est mort avant d'avoir atteint cette étape.

(In the process of living, one acquires the faculty of dissociating intelligence from sensibility. This happens sooner or later by the acquisition of a new indispensable but dangerous faculty : scepticism. Laforgue died before reaching that stage.) ("La Sensibilité de Jules Laforgue", *Promenades littéraires*, 1, p. 106).

This idea of dissociation, as Aldington has pointed out, is Gourmont's 'most important contribution to thought', and was 'a formulation of his delight in analysis.'⁴ Eliot unceremoniously transferred to English literary history what Gourmont considered an inevitable part of the psychological growth of an individual : the dissociation of sensibility. In the words of Edward Lobb : 'Eliot had discussed the growth of the English language as though he were tracing the development of an individual's mind....'⁵

On Impersonality :

Il n'y a pas toujours de relation logique entre la vie et l'oeuvre d'un écrivain....

(There is not always a logical relation between the life and the work of a writer)

(*Promenades littéraires*, I, p. 350)

Le but de l'activité propre de l'homme est de nettoyer sa personnalité, de la laver de toute souillure

(The goal of a man's activity is to clean his personality and wash all dirt from it....)

(*Le Problème du style*, quoted by Eliot in "Philip Massinger", SW, p. 139)

Etre impersonnel c'est être personnel, selon un mode particulier : voyez Flaubert. On dirait en jargon : l'objectif est une des formes du subjectif.

(To be impersonal is to be personal, according to a particular mode. Look at Flaubert. One would say in jargon : objectivity is another form of subjectivity.) (*Promenades philosophiques*)⁶.

Si personnel que soit l'Art symboliste, il doit par un coin toucher au non-personnel.

(However personal Symbolist Art can be, it must somewhere touch upon impersonality.)

(*Le Chemin de velours*, p. 222)

The apparent contradictions in Eliot's 'impersonal' theory of poetry and the simultaneous necessity of 'a personal point of view' (SW, p. 117) are comfortably resolved if one turns to Gourmont's synthesis of the subjective and the objective, the cerebral and the emotional, the thought and the feeling, and tries to understand the equipoise he wanted in art. The continual self-sacrifice in Laforgue's poetic discourse could be chiefly responsible for such dialectical theorizing by Eliot; on the other hand, it is quite possible that Gourmont, too, was influenced by Laforgue. The latter was quite clearly Gourmont's favourite among the symbolists; he wrote more abundantly on him than on anyone else, a fact which Eliot commentators seem to be unaware of.

On Memory :

La mémoire est la piscine secrète où à notre insu, le subconscient jette son filet.....

(Memory is the secret pool, where without our knowledge, the subconscious casts its net....)

(*La Culture*, p. 51)

On Words :

J'aime les mots en eux-mêmes pour leur esthétique personnelle, dont la réalité est un des éléments; la sonorité en est un autre.

(I love words themselves for their own aesthetics; rareness is one of its qualities, sonority is another.) (*Le Chemin de velours*, p. 240)

J'ai vu naître un mot; c'est voir naître une fleur.

(I have seen the birth of a word; it is like watching the blossoming of a flower.) (*Esthétique de la langue française*, 1899, 1985 rpt., p. 13)

On Classicism :

Malgré la profonde influence que le romantisme a exercé sur l'esprit français, il est resté classique

(In spite of the profound influence of Romanticism on the French mind, it has remained classicist....)

(*Promenades littéraires*, I. p. 184)

Although Eliot stated in his preface to the 1928 edition of *The Sacred Wood* that Gourmont was 'not interested in the relation of poetry with the spiritual and social life'(see

above), this seems to be no more than a half-truth when one considers the latter's views on Catholicism and tradition in *La Culture des idées*, which remind us inevitably of Eliot's own :

Je crois que le catholicisme, en France, fait partie de la tradition littéraire. Le catholicisme est le christianisme paganisé. Religion est à la fois mystique et sensuelle, il peut satisfaire, il a satisfait uniquement, pendant longtemps, les deux tendances primordiales et contradictoires de l'humanité, qui sont de vivre à la fois dans le fini et dans l'infini, ou, en termes plus acceptables, dans la sensation et dans l'intelligence.

(I believe that Catholicism in France is a part of the literary tradition. Catholicism is paganised Christianity. Religion is mystic and sensual at the same time, it can satisfy, it has uniquely satisfied for a long time two primordial and contradictory tendencies of humanity : to live in the finite and the infinite at the same time or, in more acceptable terms, to simultaneously have both feeling and intelligence). (*La Culture*, p. 140)

Despite the fact that Gourmont was no great admirer of Christianity ('Christianity has given the world nothing but lies and poison', *Le Chemin de velours*, p. 319), his rationalization of religion, tradition and culture, to my mind, anticipates Eliot's own position.

It is, therefore, not a mere platitude when Eliot calls Remy de Gourmont 'the critical consciousness of a generation' (SW, p. 44); the latter seems to be possibly the only critic who could supply to him at that particular point of time 'the conscious formulas of a sensibility in the process of formation' (ibid). As Aldington puts it, 'By refusing to leave any part of his mind uncultivated, by using his mind in its *totality*, Gourmont attempted a great thing... He tried to unite in the flow of one personality the various streams of French intellectual and artistic life.'⁷

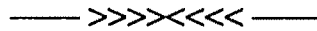
Eliot realized quite early in his career the applicability of some of Gourmont's ideas, and tried to 'use' many of these in his own attempts to purify the dialect of the tribe, and forge a new critical discourse in English. Even the style is hauntingly similar. There is the same persuasive, often coercive, gift of argument—the arrow that goes unerringly to the centre of the target—and the same refusal to mince matters.

Without the author of *Le Problème du style*, Eliot would probably have found it far more difficult to clarify to himself and his readers his position as poet and critic. Like Coleridge, he did not seem to care from whose mouth the utterances were supposed to proceed, as long as the words were audible and intelligible.

Notes and References :

Needless to say, this note is a prelude to a longer essay. I am indebted to Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris for the original French editions of Gourmont's works, most of which are out of print. TSE's *The Sacred Wood* (1920), *Selected Essays* (1932) and *To Criticize the Critic* (1965) have been cited as SW, SE and TCC, and *The Selected Poems of Ezra Pound* (1928) as SPEP.

1. *Remy de Gourmont* (1859-1915) : French essayist, poet, novelist. One of the finest critics associated with the Symbolist movement in France, he founded in 1889, *Le Mercure de France*, the well-known Symbolist review, edited and modernized old texts, held a post at the Bibliothèque Nationale (1884-91). Gourmont began with impressionistic sketches of the Symbolists in *Le Livre des Masques* (1896), but wrote more serious criticism in *Promenades littéraires* (1904-27). He asserted the need to get away from an unquestioning acceptance of ideas. Important works include *La Culture des idées* (1900), *Le Problème du style* (1902), *Promenades philosophiques* (1905-9) and *Physique de l'amour* (1903).
2. Review of *The Sacred Wood* in *New Republic*, April 13, 1921, pp. 194-5.
3. See F.W. Bateson, "Poetry of Pseudo-learning", *Essays in Critical Dissent* (London : Longman, 1972) p. 133.
4. Richard Aldington, *Remy de Gourmont : A Modern Man of Letters* (Seattle : U of Washington Bookstore, 1928) p. 11.
5. Edward Lobb, *T.S. Eliot and the Romantic Critical Tradition* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981) p. 45.
6. Quoted by Ezra Pound in *Literary Essays* (London : Faber and Faber, 1954) p. 353.
7. Aldington, p. 21.



THE PORTRAIT OF THE FASCIST IN THE NOVELS OF SALMAN RUSHDIE

A study of migration and exile as preconditions for creation of the fascist personality.

Nandini Bhattacharya

"For the demography of the new internationalism is the history of postcolonial migration, the narratives of cultural and political diaspora, the major social displacements of peasant and aboriginal communities, the poetics of exile, the grim prose of political and economic refugees."¹

"When a tyrant falls, the world's shadows lighten and only hypocrites grieve."²

For a novelist who firmly believes that there are no 'hiding places', that one is irrevocably 'irradiated by history' and that there can be no 'politics-free fictional universe', (*Imaginary Homelands*, p.100) it only follows that dictators and fascists (who have been so much a part of twentieth century history), would occupy the centre stage in Rushdie's works. That Rushdie chooses the decolonized Asian countries as the stage for his political drama, where imperial structures of erstwhile colonizers have been dismantled only to accommodate new forms of control and exploitation by the new ruling elite, makes the centrality of authoritarian characters seem axiomatic. The authoritarian personality, valorizing rigid ideological positions, is a perfect counterpoint in novels that have set out to celebrate hybridity, pluralism and diversity.

A detailed study of fascists compels the reader to address some of the most important questions in Rushdie's novels—those relating to exile, migration and deculturation in a postcolonial society. Questions like—is the fascist born or made? Why does he hanker after an essential purity of race, nation, language or religion? Why is his first target the immigrant, exile or the outsider? Why are control, order and machismo essential to his existence?—are germane to an understanding of his novels as a whole. This essay proposes to explore how conditions of migration and rootlessness contribute to the creation of the fascist personality. Having been a migrant himself, Rushdie has always spoken in glowing (romantic?) terms about migrants and their natural proclivity towards tolerance and sympathy.—"To experience any form of migration is to get a lesson in the importance of tolerating the other point of view. One might almost say that migration ought to be the essential training for all would-be democrats." (*Imaginary Homelands*.pp.280)

However, his texts problematize the romantic ideal of the tolerant migrant. Rushdie's fascists are almost inevitably rootless, exiles, stalking postcolonial urban jungles: "A city is a camp for refugees" (*Shame* pp.145). Having lost the certainties of the past, often suddenly and violently, they are determined to construct an absolute, monolithic, essential self, denying the fragmentation of the past. They are convinced that an internally

consistent, unambiguous ethical system is necessary for social progress and moral growth. In what seems like a strange paradox once in power, their first target is the migrant, the exile, the other, whom they strive to humiliate or coerce into sameness. Authoritarianism is inevitably tinged with a sense of religious or cultural marginality and hence the constant need to valorize aggression, machismo, control and power. Having experienced major dislocations, the fascist has no tolerance for ambiguity, asymmetry or inconsistency. In this context, it is interesting to refer to Rabindranath's *Gora*³, where Gora's adoption of an ultra-Hindu fundamentalist posture becomes a weapon to combat the humiliations and dislocations of colonial rule and the shameless mimicry of Western mores by his countrymen. Rushdie's fascists are often anguished men and women who use their rigidity and aggression as a means to come to terms with their dislocated, fragmented pasts.

Though *Grimus* is an early and unsuccessful novel, the portrait of the fascist as an uprooted migrant turned omnipotent dictator, contains germs of many such characters to follow in Rushdie's novels. Rushdie establishes a direct relation between Grimus' exiled status and his transformation into a sinister magus controlling the world of K and the minds of its inhabitants. Described as "evidently Middle European, a refugee no doubt" (*Grimus* pp. 208) and inhabitant of a dingy suburban terrace on the margins of the city, Grimus displays the classic signs of marginality, uprooting and deculturation. Victim of racial prejudice, he suffers terribly in the prison camps and this changes his attitude to the human race forever :

The undermining horror of the prison camp, the destruction of belief in human dignity, of his belief in the whole of the human race...since he had no regard for his species, he did not care what he did to them. They had done enough to him. (*Grimus*, p. 243)

In *Shame* Rushdie quotes the exiled novelist Milan Kundera—"A name means a continuity with the past and people without a past are people without a name" (*Shame*, pp-88). Grimus too, is a man without past and name and must find new ways to describe himself. This act of definition must begin with a name. Virgil notes that Grimus was not his real name. "He changed it from something unpronounceable when he arrived in this country some thirty years ago" (*Grimus*, p. 209). It is a significant act of self-construction because Grimus is derived anagrammatically from Simurg, the mythical, vast, singular, all-powerful bird. However, it also signifies "the grim and grimy predicament of the life-force in a situation where grimace replaces smiles and laughter".⁴ Rushdie's fascists are inevitably grim, silent figures disliking fun, laughter or even speech.

With the help of the magical stone Rose, he is determined to 'conceptualize' the monolithic, perfect and immortal kingdom of K where he is not only the omnipotent ruler but also an omniscient god. Going far beyond the thought policing of modern dictators, Grimus is actually able to think and control the thoughts of the inhabitants of 'K'. As

Grimus proceeds to conceptualize the inhabitants of K his co-creator Virgil expresses doubts about "problem in assimilating immigrants from these different planets into one society" (*Grimus* p. 211-12). Grimus however insists that the differences are too minute to matter. This insistence on sameness and singularity soon leads to the expulsion of Nicholas Deggle and Virgil (both co-creators of K) as soon as they express dissent. It also leads to a ruthless subjection of women who are treated as the quintessential Other. Grimus, like many of Rushdie's fascists, lacks normal sex drive and has no interest in women. He prefers the plain Bird-dog to beautiful Liv because as Virgil notes, "He wants a servant, not a mistress." (*Grimus* p. 217) Mating with a woman in an act of procreation is also an acknowledgement of difference. Grimus would rather 'choose' his 'son' who has "a likeness to (me) him which is also alien" (*Grimus* p. 213), thereby reproducing as it were asexually and denying the woman her biological power to reproduce. Rushdie, I am sure, was aware of Bhabha's famous axiom: "The desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite."⁵ In a ritual act of investiture, he calls upon his look-alike Flapping-Eagle—"my son, what father fathered a son like this, as I do in my sterility." (*Grimus* p. 243). But Eagle refuses fusion, retains his identity while rejecting Grimus and reversing his aim—the preservation and perpetuation of Kalf Islands where immortality and the halting of time has merely created a hell of unending patterns of thought and behaviour. While the world of Grimus dissolving, Eagle is mating with Media—a confession that supreme joy lies in the unmaking of the rigid pattern of divine perfection.

Though the fascist in *Midnight's Children* is not an exile, she shares the migrant's position of Otherness, asymmetry and deviance. As a powerful woman in a male dominated society, she is somewhat of an aberration. That she is explicitly called the Widow with all its associations of ill omens in the Hindu psyche identifies her as the classic Other. According to Ashis Nandy, one of the reasons for sustained widow hatred (leading to forcible burning of widows on the pyres of their dead husbands and imposition of severe mores of self-torture on them) in the nineteenth century among Hindus was a deep-rooted misogyny and irrational belief in her innate destructive cannibalistic qualities. Thus the death of her husband was due to her own weak ritual potency and "an instance of homicidal wishes come true."⁶ The terrible atrocities inflicted on Saleem in the Widows Hostel, therefore acquire an especially sinister dimension.

But then Mrs. Gandhi is not just the Widow but also 'Mother India', "who was not only Prime Minister of India but also aspired to be Devi, the Mother goddess in her most terrible aspect, possessor of the shakti of the gods, a multi-limbed divinity with centre parting and schizophrenic hair..." (*Midnight's Children*, p. 438). The fear she inspires can only be gauged if there is an understanding of the Indian male's deeply ambivalent response to his mother:—"In terms of organization of personality...the Indian lives in his

inner world less with a feared father, than with a powerful aggressive mother. Manifestly he idealizes her and sees her as the repository of all nurture and motherliness. Underneath this there are deep doubts about the stability of her nurture and the way she uses her powers to aggress. Contrarily the father is seen as a co-victim of the castrating mother."⁷ In Mrs. Gandhi, Rushdie combines the abstract fear of the fascist with the particular Indian anxiety about the ill-omened widow and the castrating mother figure.

What begins as a vague anxiety soon deepens into horror as the Widow imposes the infamous Emergency on the state of India, "and suspension-of-civil-rights, and censorship-of-the-press, and armoured-units-on-special-alert, and arrest-of-subversive-elements." (*Midnight's Children*, pp. 439) As metaphoric midnight descends upon India, reality begins to resemble a nightmare—"Yes perhaps a nightmare : green and black the Widow's hair and clutching hand and children / mmff and little balls go blying green and black her hand is green her nails are black as black." (*Midnight's Children*, pp. 422). In the Widow's hostel (in a grotesque parody of the real sterilization programme) the midnight's children are forced to undergo vasectomy and their castrated genitals fed to pie dogs. Mother India comes to resemble fantastic figures like "dayans, jinns and bhoot."⁸

Like all dictators, she is the votary of sloganized centrality ('Indira is India and India is Indira'). She would like to iron out differences and sanitize her surroundings by bulldozing slums in the name of civic beautification programme.

In the year 2000, when India mourns the twenty-fifth anniversary of the imposition of Emergency, it is interesting to see her actions as typical of ruling elite in decolonized Asian countries, who inherit structures of exploitation and control from their erstwhile colonial masters and seek to perpetuate them under different nomenclatures.—"When the Constitution was altered to give the Prime-Minister well nigh absolute powers, I smelt the ghosts of ancient empires in the air...in that city which was littered with phantoms of Slave kings and Mughals, of Aurangzeb the merciless and last, pink conquerors, I inhaled once again the sharp aroma of despotism." (*Midnight's Children*, pp. 397) As Una Chaudhuri notes —

"The Raj... surreptitiously bequeaths its vision—its psychological structures, its institutions, its habits of mind, its language. Thus for decades following the death of the Raj, a class of Indians continues to collude, unwittingly to a spectral colonization of India."⁹

The problem of exile and migration in postcolonial countries as well as countries of their erstwhile colonizers is of central importance in Rushdie's third novel *Shame*. Is it therefore, merely coincidence that the novel boasts of not one but two full-fledged dictators? *Shame* reveals how imperialist tactics are duplicated by the ruling elite in

decolonized Asian countries within forms of patriarchal control.

The novel begins with a systematic effort to problematize the concepts of alien/insider, son-of-the-soil/immigrant. The self-conscious narrator anticipates opposition to his act of telling the story of Pakistan, as he is an outsider and immigrant—"Outsider Trespasser! You have no right to this subject!... Poacher! Pirate! We know you, with your foreign language wrapped around you like a flag : speaking about us in your forked tongue, what can you tell us but lies?" (*Shame* p. 28) Rushdie however questions the very basis of this Manichean opposition and problematizes the terms outsider and immigrant to obtain certain interesting results. Comparing himself with Pakistan, he notes, "When individuals come unstuck from their native land, they are called migrants. When nations do the same thing, the act is called secession... I may be such a person. Pakistan may be such a country." The very name and existence of this country was thought up in exile. "It is well known that the term 'Pakistan', an acronym, was thought up in England by a group of Muslim intellectuals....So it was a word born in exile which then went to the East, was borne - across, or translated and imposed itself on history" (*Shame* p. 87). So, for a country which is essentially hybrid as most postcolonial countries are, to claim purity of essence and origin and discriminate between insider and immigrant is ridiculous.

Iskander Harappa, the landed aristocrat and son of the soil, mocks Raza Hyder as a Tiliyar, "a skinny little migrating bird good for nothing but shooting out of the sky" (*Shame* p. 105) Harappa also makes it a point to remind every one who matters that, "General Hyder had been raised in the enemy state across the border, after all, and there was evidence of a Hindu great grandmother on his Father's side, so those ungodly philosophies had long ago infected his blood" (*Shame* p. 84). Not only has Raza come from the ungodly east and so is technically a refugee, he has met and romanced his future wife in a refugee camp. When Bilquis is shown the door by Bariamma, the matriarch in Raza's household she is called, "mohajir! Immigrant! Pack up double quick and be off to what gutter you choose" (*Shame* p. 85). Bilquis, however, losing all certainties of the past at one blow, clutches on to Hyder because she has discerned in Raza "a man rooted solidly in an indefatigable sense of himself" (*Shame* p. 67). One way of establishing himself as the son of the soil, as pure and authentic is to launch upon an intensive Islamization programme under the aegis of self-proclaimed god-men like Maulana Dawood. As the narrator notes—"Autocratic regimes find it useful to espouse the rhetoric of faith, because people respect that language, are reluctant to oppose it. This is how religions shore up dictators; by encircling them with words of power, words which people are reluctant to see discredited, disenfranchised, mocked." (*Shame* p. 67) Raza, in an effort to root himself to certainties, censors all television programmes except theological lectures, strictly imposes praying five times a day, shoots down beggars and ruthlessly muzzles any kind of opposition. But what makes Raza Hyder's rule all the more

nightmarish is the constant demeaning of women, their constant shaming. So intent is Hyder on having a male child that he will forcibly deny the existence of his newborn girl, insisting that there must have been a mistake. In *Shame* the portrait of the fascist is nuanced by inclusion of oppressive patriarchy that equates women with dogs and firmly believes that 'woman' is a bad word. As Bilquis's father who is derisively called Mahmoud the Woman, notes, "Woman...is there no end to the burdens this word is capable of bearing? Was there ever such a broad backed and also such a dirty word?" (*Shame* p. 62).

Iskander, posing as the authentic indigene, is paradoxically the son of Sir Mir Harappa, knighted by English authorities as reward for collaboration. His ancestral house is a gallery of Western artifacts while Iskander himself is dapper in Pierre Cardin suits, steeped in Western culture and education and Western notions of democracy. However when it comes to ruling his own country he is an equally old hand at silencing political opposition, unleashing a reign of terror, and treating his country as his personal fiefdom to exploit and control. Using women as playthings and flaunting the likes of Pinkie Aurangzeb in the presence of his wife Rani Harappa, the so-called democratic, suave, Iskander enacts a similar pattern of patriarchal oppression in a post-colonial society as his provincial, unsophisticated cousin Raza Hyder. Yet when he wants to reinvent himself as a popular leader of the masses he sheds his Westernized persona for an authentic, puritan and Islamic one, concocting absurd ideologies like Islamic Socialism. "He screamed in regional dialects about the rape of the country by fat cats and tiliyars (migrants)" (*Shame* p. 151). In his book entitled *Colonialism and Cultural Identity* Patrick Colm Hogan defines this kind of a stance as Neocolonial Nativism. He notes, "Specifically, neocolonial nativists celebrate indigenous traditions in order to advance their own interests as junior partners of the former colonists."¹⁰ Iskander's metamorphosis into an abstaining puritan to gain votes, elicits grim humour on the part of the narrator— "Repression is a seamless garment; a society which is authoritarian in its social and sexual codes, which crushes its women under intolerable burdens of honour and propriety, breeds repressions of other kinds as well. Contrariwise, Dictators are always—at least in public, on other people's behalf—puritanical" (*Shame* p. 173).

In what seems like a mirror action, the migrant community of Asian fathers in Britain also enacts the role of the patriarchal fascist, going to the length of murdering their daughters on grounds of violation of traditional sexual codes. Marginalized, despised and humiliated as an unwanted backward community in Britain, they revert to fundamentalist postures in an effort to construct a stable and heroic identity. As the narrator notes, "Humiliate people for long enough and a certain wildness bursts out of them" (*Shame* p. 117).

In *Shame*, ultimately Rushdie established an adroit analogy between insider/migrant, man/woman, Self/Other and problematizes all these categories. The powerful man,

possessing stable identity, is exposed as hopelessly fractured and impotent. The woman who shares the migrants' position of powerlessness emerges as enormously powerful and destructive. Violence engenders violence and the culture of intolerance, oppression and senseless cruelty that Raza had perpetrated literally comes home to him as his daughter Sufiya Zinoibia, is metamorphosed into a beast that copulates with men and tears off their heads. The final irony is Raza's escape (after his political downfall) camouflaged in a woman's burqua (veil) and his brutal end at the hands of three old women, the three mothers of Omar Khyam Shakil. Iskander's fall is embroidered in Rani Harappa's shawl. The Asian girl in 'Proper London' who shares both the migrant and the woman's position of powerlessness, becomes the cause of race riots in London. 'We are energy; we are fire; we are light' (*Shame* p. 117), the humiliated outsider seems to say.

The Satanic Verses presents the most sustained exposition of the problem of migration and how it breeds fascists and in that sense, it is the most important text for this study. Rushdie notes with considerable dismay that while postcolonial nations have inherited structures bequeathed by the British Raj, Britain has consolidated her last empire in Britain itself. There she is now practicing every kind of fascist tactic to dominate, humiliate and coerce the non-whites, again predictably identifying them as 'immigrants'—"It sometimes seems that the British authorities, no longer capable of exporting governments, have chosen instead to import a new empire, a new community of subject people of whom they think, and with whom they can deal, in very much the same way as their predecessors thought of and dealt with 'the fluttered folk and wild', 'the new-caught, sullen peoples, half-devil, half-child', who made up for Rudyard Kipling. The White Man's Burden." (*Imaginary Homelands*, p. 130). The reason is the persistence of ideas of racial and ethnic difference, that formed the intellectual backbone of nineteenth century imperial practices :

British racism and by that I mean a fully developed ideology, complete with trappings of pseudo-science and 'reason'—first flowered as a means of legitimizing the lucrative slave trade, and was patently economic in origin. It expanded, during the Asian and African colonial experience, into a rationale for world domination....But it is often argued that those old days, those old ideas are long dead and play no significant part in the events of contemporary Britain. If only that were true... If only the ideas of the past did not rot down into the earth and fertilize the ideas of the present. (*Imaginary Homelands*, p. 145)

The fascist in *The Satanic Verses* is not an individual person (though the Tory Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, euphemistically called Maggie May could fit the role) but an entire society infected with the virus of racial hatred. Rushdie goes on to show how they permeate every major institution in the country, from the police force to the judiciary

to the commercial institutions—"It's just not good enough to deplore the existence of neo-fascists in society. They exist because they are permitted to exist" (*Imaginary Homelands*, p. 135). But more specifically, "For the citizens of the new imported empire, for the colonized Asians and Blacks of Britain, the police force represents that colonizing army, those new regiments of occupation and control" (*Imaginary Homelands*, p. 132). Salahuddin Chamchawallah gets a taste of this neo-fascism when he is discovered in Rosa Diamond's bedroom after he has summarily crashed down from the exploded plane Bostan. Kicked, punched, abused, forced to eat his own excrement, he is subjected to every humiliation and torture conceivable. When Saladin still insists he is an authentic British citizen, quoting several numbers to prove his identity, all he receives is more abuse and derisive comments—"Who are you trying to kid? ...Look at yourself. Sally who? -What kind of a name is that for an Englishman?" (*The Satanic Verses* 'Ellowen Deeowen', p. 163) Cultural historian Paul Gilroy notes the 'tragic popularity of ideas about integrity and purity of cultures' which leads to false perceptions about Black and Asian settlers being 'an intrusion into a vision of authentic British life that, prior to their arrival, was as stable and peaceful as it was ethnically undifferentiated.'¹¹ As Whisky Sisodia says, "The trouble with the English is that their hiss hiss history happened overseas; so they dodo don't know what it means." (*The Satanic Verses*, 'A City Visible but Unseen', p. 343). Gilroy goes on to argue that 'the most heroic, subaltern English nationalism and countercultural patriotisms are perhaps better understood as having been generated in a complex pattern of antagonistic relationships with a supra-national and imperial world' and that this 'inside/outside relationship should be recognized as a more powerful, more complex and more contested element in the historical, social and cultural memory "of Britain.'¹² The icon of the modern British nation is "ranter, toaster, deejay nonpareil—the prancing Pinkwallah,...a seven-foot Albino, his hair the palest rose, the whites of his eyes likewise, his features unmistakably Indian, the haughty nose, long thin lips, a face from a Hamza-nama cloth. An Indian who has never seen India, East India man from the West Indies, white black man. A star" (*The Satanic Verses*, p. 291-292). In the figure of Rosa Diamond the so called pure authentic English lady who has an Argentinean past, or the police officer named Novak who claims authenticity because he belongs to Weybridge where the Beatles came from, Rushdie attempts to reveal the complex, mongrel nature of British identities in the twentieth century. In the figures of the police officers, we hear the voice of the anguished outsiders who would like to use aggression to cope with their insecurities. Here again fascism is born out of an inherent sense of cultural marginality. All we can do is sing rap in exasperation with Pinkwallah "Now-me-feel-indignation—when-dem-talk-immigration-when-dem-make-insinuation-we-no-part-a-de-nation-an-mi-make-proclamation-a-de-true-situation-how-we-make-contribution-since-de-Rome-occupation." (*The Satanic Verses* p. 292).

In *The Moor's Last Sigh*, Rushdie again returns to the context of the subcontinent and a dictator who is an identifiable political figure. Raman Fielding, who gets his name because of a cricket-crazy father who hovered on the peripheries of Bombay Gymkhana

and pleaded to be given if not one bowling or batting, then at least one fielding, turns out to be a ferocious don, using religious fundamentalism to power his rise in the murky world of Indian politics. He has remarkable similarities with marginal men like Shiva in *Midnight's Children* who rose from humble backgrounds to interact with the rich and the mighty. Raman Fielding is able to gauge and successfully utilize the desire of urban Indians uprooted from their local and vernacular cultures to belong to a clear-cut, goal-oriented, unabashedly aggressive programme that promises to crush all outsiders, religious or regional, and lead the chosen on a path of prosperity and self-pride.

'What was interesting was how much the city's blue blood cared for Fielding...the youngest, sleekest, hippest young cats in the urban jungle came to prowl in his Lalgum grounds...He was against unions, in favour of strikes, against working women, in favour of Sati, against poverty and in favour of wealth. He was against 'immigrants' to the city, by which he meant all non-Marathi speakers, including those who had been born there, and in favour of its 'natural residents'...He spoke of a golden age 'before the invasions' when good Hindu men and women could roam free.' (*The Moor's Last Sigh*, p. 300)

Like Shiva, he valorizes masculinity and brute strength. However, unlike Shiva, there are no redeeming touches to Fielding and he is presented as an unalloyed ogre who dies by the same sword he had wielded. What is disturbing about Fielding's portrait is the increasing acceptability of such quick-fix solution vendors in the Indian polity and a growing support for a culture of violence and intolerance to any kind of asymmetry or deviation from the perceived norm. The insistent recurrence of fascists in Rushdie's novels is a reminder of the havoc, pain and suffering that can be wrecked in the name of nation, religion or ethnic group by men/women espousing rigid ideological positions.

Notes and References :

All works of Salman Rushdie are parenthetically referred to in the essay with appropriate page numbers. Publication details of these works are as follows :-

A. SALMAN RUSHDIE : FICTION

1. *Grimus*, London, Vintage, 1996; first published in Great Britain by Victor Gollanz in 1975.
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B.

1. Homi K. Bhabha, 'Introduction', *The Location of Culture*, (London and New York, Routledge, 1994), p. 5.
2. Salman Rushdie, 'Zia-Ul-Haq', *Imaginary Homelands : Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* (London, Grant Book in association with Penguin Books, 1992), p. 53. Henceforth all references to the above text will appear in the essay with appropriate page references.
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WRITING INDIA: SOME INDIAN - ENGLISH SHORT STORIES

Sudeshna Kar Barua

In his introduction to *Mirrorwork: 50 Years of Indian Writing*, published in 1997 to coincide with the fiftieth anniversary of India's independence, Salman Rushdie argued that "Indo-Anglian" writing was becoming stronger and more important than the literature being written in India's 16 "official" languages¹. In her review of the Pulitzer-winning collection *Interpreter of Maladies* in 1999, Katherine Guckenberger added, "These are heady days for Indian writing, and they're only getting headier."² Guckenberger, it seems, has looked upon such writings, short stories in this case, as the West's window on the East and reading as a means of gathering information and filling cultural gaps.

However, from their observations it is evident that both Rushdie and Guckenberger have more recent Indian writings or diasporic literature in mind rather than Indian – English Literature that dates back to the work of Dean Mahomed³. Indian writing in English is more than two hundred years old but the short story that I wish to focus on arrived late, as late as in the closing years of the nineteenth century. But, despite the delay, it has neither had a stunted growth nor has there been the problem of flagging reader-interest resulting in the loss of its clientele. Rather, by now, the Indian English short story has become indispensable, a "must" for all, mainly on the other side of the oceans, desirous to read and learn of other realities. It has been accepted as a page out of life affording readers a glimpse into reality, a quick journey into the lives of Indians rooted in their soil or else displaced or misplaced.

Ironically for the colonizers, even though both Shoshee Chunder Dutta's *Realities of Indian Life : Stories Collected from the Criminal Reports of India* (1885), the first Indian — English short story collection, and Cornelia Sorabji's four collections (1901-1908), some of the earliest in the twentieth century, were published in London, the development of this genre and a rise in its popularity seemed to coincide with their loss of India, that also decided the fragmentation and the ultimate disintegration of the Empire. For us 'decolonization' came to mean more than freedom and self-rule. India began to reach out. Though a plain matter of policy for the United States, America's opening its doors to immigrants following the passing of a law in 1940 and then the Immigration and Nationality Act of October 3 1965,⁴ affected Indian-English fiction most positively. Joining the Indians at home in the task of writing about India were new immigrants, their extended selves, not just "trans-national hybrids"⁵, exploring, seeking, recording new experiences and popularizing diasporic writing by creating a market of its own.

In his preface to *An Incarnation of the Snow*, written some ninety-three years ago, F.W. Bain had rather superciliously commented that it was after the Indo-British contact

that "India a withered trunk... suddenly shot out with foreign foliage."⁶ The Indians began writing in English. In his enthusiasm to establish *his* idea of India's literary talent, supposedly dry and shrivelled, re-gaining life only through the British healing touch, the point that Bain had missed was that from the time the Indians learnt to write in English, they seemed committed to a cause. The foreign language borrowed from the rulers came to be used by Indian writers to talk about themselves and write India, as it were, from angles as diverse and contrasted as conceivable.

For its amazing diversity, unequalled and unsurpassed, India in its totality and entirety eludes the grasp of any one writer. It is always a slice that the reader is offered, the choice of both region and people determined by the writer's personal experience and recollections. A writer, it is known, is more comfortable writing about his place and his people. So Soshee Chandra Dutt's collection bears the name *Bengaliana: A Dish of Rice and Curry and other Indigestible Ingredients* and some of Cornelia Sorabji's stories are about the Parsi community just as Rohinton Mistry's are at present. The little-known T.S. Natesan (pen-name Shankar Ram) wrote mainly about the Tamils in the villages of Tamil Nadu and in a way anticipated not only Raja Rao but also R.K. Narayan who, notwithstanding Naipaul's adverse remark that he created an unreal India⁷, has made the non-existent Malgudi come alive. The new writer Siddhartha Deb's recently-launched book, *A Point of Return*, too, is a reminder of his close association with the hills of the North-East. It may be of interest to note that some like Anjana Appachana have taken to blending. Though a South Indian, Appachana is a product of the Delhi that many of her short stories are located in. So her protagonist in *When Anklets Twinkle* must have a "Madras", a South Indian, as a tenant for his *barsati* in North India. The Indian and immigrant writers of English short stories either *here* or *there*, may film, as it were, scenes from within India or outside but almost always zoom in for close-ups of characters basically Indian. The message pronounced is, "We exist. And in our own way."

Standing in a post-postcolonial age, defined by neo-colonialism and the diasporic movement of people across the world and resultant cultural shifts, it is more than natural for the reader to look upon diasporic writing as a comparatively new phenomenon, quite different owing to perspectives and approaches hitherto untried. This is not quite the case. Let us not look at diasporic writing as rootless.

In the case of short stories, if we so much as glance down the list of writers Soshee Chunder Dutt onwards, there will be stops to tarry awhile. And with little effort one may pick out tales written perhaps fifty to sixty years before a Radhika Sita Chari or a Bharati Mukherjee, which may/could easily have been her model, her source of inspiration, the similarity/similarities strikingly prominent and suggestive of this continuity and association. A sentiment voiced or a feeling experienced by one writer in the early twentieth century, for instance, may reappear and be re-used in some form, perhaps

unconsciously, in a tale of the late twentieth or the twenty-first century, not even remotely similar. But it is there, there to be seen, heard and felt.

Two hundred years of domination is not easily forgotten. We have not yet succeeded in not being aware of what Mary Louise Pratt calls the presence of the Imperial Eye or Imperial Gaze, marginalising the colonized. Or of erasing from the mind the belief that, 'Greatness was not to be found among the uncivilized and the underdeveloped. Greatness was over there in civilized Great Britain and civilized Europe.'⁸ As Edward Said and Frantz Fanon hold, Orientalism and Colonialism have branded the educated English-knowing Colonizer. These have made him/her fight shy of either accepting or promoting his/her culture that goes into the shaping and establishing of the Self which, almost on its own, can strongly challenge the Other concept. Unfortunately, the presence of the British on Indian soil in the role of the master has been an oppressive reality, colouring and affecting the Indian personality adversely. Our writers, keenly aware of the East-West contact/juxtaposition/clash, (Salman Rushdie's collection of short stories bears the simple title *East West*) more by habit than by effort, have been finding it difficult to steer clear. Hence the recurrence of this theme in their tales and thus the bringing together of the White and the Brown, the East and the West, with the West generally scoring over the East with ease.

Shahmal's comment in Amin Kamal's Kashmiri story *The Cock Fight*, that it is always 'the foreign cock chasing the native cock away', is in loud and open acknowledgement of our accepted inferiority.⁹ Humiliating though it may seem to the present-day reader, in many of the Indian-English stories involving representatives of the two Worlds, the Westerner is projected as the Superior, more an object of fear than of admiration, his presence leaving the Indians unsure, uncomfortable, cringing.

In Mulk Raj Anand's simple tale *The Golden Watch*, for instance, the humble despatch clerk Srijut Sharma is summoned by his Sahibs, one perhaps intentionally named Mr. West. Sharma learns that he is to retire from service at the age of fifty and as a farewell gift will receive a golden watch. There is no question even of a simple query, much less a protest. Sharma receives his gift as meekly as 'a beggar takes alms' and decides to leave for Jullunder where, 'time just stood still and no one bothered about keeping appointments.'¹⁰ That he can move into his own world away from the pressure of his Sahibs' imperious presence and demands 'is consolation enough, so it seems. No longer will Acton Sahib's *smile*, veiling a snarl, make him lose his sleep.

Fear of a similar kind grips Govind Ram, the old retired gatekeeper of Engladia, in *The Gateman's Gift*¹¹ by R.K. Narayan. Narayan's Govind Ram, like Anand's Sharma, is in awe of his Sahib. The envelope containing a letter from his boss upsets him so much that he even thinks of taking it to the X-ray department to get some idea of its content.

Even when he finds that it contains a hundred-rupee note, a token of appreciation from his boss for the model of the front office that he had made and sent, Govind Ram cannot relax. The incident affects him psychologically, the envelope being a constant reminder of his Boss's frightening authority. If it shames an Indian reader now to read about Govind Ram's trepidation he can, for consolation, turn to Stephen Leacock's *My Financial Career*. Opening an account in a bank and keeping it going so terrifies Leacock's protagonist that he decides to keep his money in cash in his pocket and the 'savings in silver dollars in a sock.'¹² Strange fears no doubt, but not unnatural anywhere, here or there.

In Bhisham Sahni's *The Boss Came to Dinner*, Shamnath, much better placed than either Sharma or Govind Ram, is also in a state of nervous excitement. His boss is coming to dinner. The house has to be made presentable for the American executive. Neither husband nor wife can stop even for moment, not even to wipe the perspiration from his/her face. Things are pushed under beds and tables, all trash is pushed out of sight excepting Shamnath's mother. The son and his wife are at a loss, not agreeing on where exactly to tuck her. The old woman, shabby and dishevelled, is a complete misfit in the house, otherwise sparkling like a new pin. Though somewhat senile, she senses the tension and is anxious 'that everything should go well.' She too is 'scared of English Sahibs even from a distance, and this one, was American.

God only knew what sort of questions American Sahibs asked.'¹³

The Sahibs' presence is unnerving. A Sahib is White, he is different. He is powerful and therefore he is to be feared. Srijut Sharma, Govind Ram, Shamnath, his wife, Shamnath's mother—not one of them is equipped to meet a foreigner without a tremor. The white man is *allowed* to dominate. This is "culture domination" almost by consent.¹⁴

Nervousness, not entirely dissimilar, still grips some Indians away from India trying to negotiate the West so many years after Independence and frequent East-West interactions. The tremor has not quite subsided. Panna's Indian husband in Bharati Mukherjee's *A Wife Story*¹⁵, in spite of being a man, is unsure. The West is unmanageable and its people overbearing. His attempt to conceal his fear, the fear of even conversing with Americans, with their accent and drawl, is childish. He would rather stay away and avoid contact. The Indian immigrant in Radhika Sita Chari's story *Different Small Town*¹⁶ cannot relax in the company of her American schoolmate whom she meets after a long gap. As the school's single 'brown kid' she had always felt the pain of not being accepted. America had not been kind enough and she has not forgotten it. The protagonist of Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Third and Final Continent*¹⁷, modelled on her father, finds the hundred and three-year-old American landlady Mrs. Croft's presence intimidating. In spite of feeling insulted and idiotic, he has to shout "Splendid" at the top of his voice in recognition of American glory every time she demands and commands. He is one of the penniless bachelors, one of the *othersiders*, finding the West a difficult terrain.

Writing long after India's freedom and from a land so many thousands of miles away from the sub-continent, these writers of the diaspora place their fingers on the raw spot and sense the discomfort of the settlers or would-be settlers. This discomfort is real, its cause so deep-seated that the tremor, as I said, cannot be quelled altogether.

Some of Bharati Mukherjee, Radhika Sita Chari and Jhumpa Lahiri's immigrants do feel almost as out of water now as Anand and Narayan's Indians did in the past within India. It is a nagging feeling of being inadequate and perhaps small. The only saving grace is that in India neither Narayan's Govind Ram nor Sahni's old mother is so useless so as to be dismissed and discarded. The retired gatekeeper does not settle down to a life of total inaction. He creates. He makes "fascinating" models out of clay and wood dust and the old Punjabi lady can embroider and make *Phulkari* so intricate so as to leave the watchers, including the foreigners, spellbound. Two old people, no longer active, are, in a way, the worthy successors of all the unknown and nameless Indian craftsmen Nehru has hailed for their skill and expertise in the days of India's glory¹⁸.

In the West, Lahiri's narrator in *The Third and Final Continent* finds for himself the job of a librarian in the processing department at MIT. He begins to earn enough to support a wife and gains independence in the form of a furnished apartment. In *Mrs. Sen's*, Mrs. Sen, an Indian, can be given the charge of an American boy by his American mother and till one point proves the better guardian of the two. The dexterity with which she produces florets, cubes, slices and shreds from whole vegetables amazes the American boy just as her strong ties with India does. Eliot learns to understand and feel India with his eleven-year-old mind and heart. This, Rajeshwar Mittapalli explains in a very interesting paper entitled 'Hybrid Identities in Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies*', is "hybridity occurring in the reverse direction."¹⁹

Contact with the unfamiliar may be fear-inducing and displacement, of any kind within one's own country or otherwise, that makes such contacts unavoidable, can leave an individual perplexed and shaken. It is natural for the individual to feel estranged in a situation, unfamiliar and alien. One may here remember the expression on the faces Pearl Buck's refugees when driven by necessity they filed into an alien land, amidst unfriendly people. This discomfort, for reasons not entirely similar, has found expression in successive stories, its victim ranging from a child to an adolescent, from a boy to an adult.

In Mulk Raj Anand's *The Lost Child*, a child suddenly finds itself separated from its parents in a village fair. The kind man who comes to the boy's rescue fails to console him for he is no substitute for the child's parents and the life he is familiar with. The child is lost and he must return to his small but familiar world. His need 'symbolizes a universal human plight'²⁰ as does Phatik's in Rabindra Nath Tagore's *Homecoming*²¹. Life in Calcutta

without his family is unbearable and the boy begins to pine for his people and his little village by the river. Depression and mental agony finally claim Phatik and death releases him from the *prison* circumstance has pushed him into.

The lost child's fears, Phatik's homesickness are all just as palpable as the craving of the physically displaced like Mr. Pirzada, in present-day writings. Phatik had been subjected to his aunt's cruelty but Mr. Pirzada, in Jhumpa Lahiri's *When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine*,²² despite the comforts America offers and the warmth and hospitality extended by Lilia's parents, yearns for his home and is determined to return. He leaves for Dacca to look for his wife and children the moment Dacca opens its doors to him and he is *at ease* only when he has his wife by his side and his seven daughters, all their names beginning with A, surrounding him.

"To migrate is to experience deep changes and wrenches in the soul..." Salman Rushdie had stated in a BBC conversation. William Safran contends that this is a sad condition, the pain somewhat allayed by keeping alive the hope of returning.²³ The wistful tone in which Mr. Behl tells the protagonist Chander, in Uma Parameswaran's *The Door I Shut Behind Me*, that to settle in America is to close a number of doors is indicative of a deep-rooted sorrow. The Babu, an Australian settler, in Mena Abdullah's *The Babu from Bengal* and Deepak, an American immigrant's Indian husband, in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Doors*, cannot forget what they have left behind, their Holi, their Diwali, the Hindi film songs, the *bharta*, the *pulao* and of course India.

Immigrants cling to memories. Marina Budhos mentions how her great-grandparents came from India and settled in a small village in Guyana. It was as though they 'took India and transplanted it to the Caribbean. In this traditional and close-knit community they used kerosene lamps and walked barefoot.'²⁴

Even after their thirty years in the U.S. Jhumpa Lahiri's parents are not fully comfortable. She says, ".....I have observed a sense of emotional exile in my parents and in their friends that I feel can never go away."²⁵ And there is Lahiri's Mrs. Sen in *Mrs. Sen's*, who slips behind the wheel she is so scared of to rush for fresh fish, to be eaten from head to tail, eggs and all, just as in India. It is this invisible tie that keeps Lahiri's Boori Ma in *A Real Darwan* clinging to old memories. The "skeleton keys" of her lost boxes that she almost always carries, are the reminders of a past that can never be her present. The intense agony of some immigrants finds suitable expression in Mistry's *'Lend Me Your Light'*. The protagonist, a modern day Teiresias, cries, "I am guilty of hubris for having sought to emigrate from the land of my birth, and I must pay with the price of my burnt eyes: Me Tiresias, blind and shaking between two lives, that of Bombay and the one to come in Toronto."²⁶ Not to be able to return is also to be in exile. So Nergis

Dalal's old English husband and wife residing in the East in *The Exiles* decide to return. The West calls and they would willingly go.

If physical displacement is agony, a change in status, a shift, in the form of either marriage or widowhood, can be equally traumatic especially for Indian women. Either of the two may be a banishment, painful, if not degrading.

A kind of helplessness may be associated with a particular kind of Indian marriage, arranged and forced. A woman, dislodged from a world she is born into, faces alienation and humiliation along with a complete loss even of her near-non-existent identity and voice. She accepts, for she has to. K.A. Abbas' Radha in *Sparrows*²⁷ forgets Rahim Khan and docilely accepts a middle-aged Ram Lal as her husband and obediently and dutifully produces half-a-dozen children. On the other hand Rahim Khan vents his anger and frustration upon his meek wife who, on her wedding night, awaits him "as a sheep awaits the butcher". She is beaten and abused brutally and it's a wonder that she returns to her husband on hearing of his illness. Another equally docile and forgiving wife is Javni's youngest sister-in-law in Raja Rao's *Javni*.²⁸ The merciless beating of her husband involved with a concubine, Siddi, leaves her 'bleeding and unconscious.' Yet she will not leave him.

The other woman continues breaking homes and wives keep forgiving errant husbands. As late as in 1999, Laxmi's cousin in Montreal in Lahiri's *Sexy*²⁹ takes to bed on learning of her husband's love for another woman. But she too will forgive if he returns. When wives do walk out as in Anjana Appachana's *Bahu*, nothing more is heard of them. Good women can only wait for men to change and come back to them. And stories continue documenting their pain and suffering.

While on the theme of displacement I cannot but mention some writers' handling of the theme of widowhood, a dislodgement of a terrible kind for the Indian woman. If unsuccessful marriage is painful, widowhood is agony. Those who, like some young widows in A.S.P. Ayyar's stories, tie the knot again flouting society's dictates are the fortunate ones. The others live in abject fear because a widow is a branded Other. She is made to look different and is made to feel different. In *Javni* Ramappa, the narrator, describes the central character of the same name, as a woman whose 'broad forehead showed pain and widowhood.'³⁰ Javni's sisters-in-law make life unbearable, almost driving her to the river to drown herself. Finally Javni sets out to solve her problems on her own.

That the intervening years have not quite wiped off the fear of having to live with the in-laws after a husband's demise is evident from the words of Susmita residing in U.S.A. far, far away from Javni's small village in Karnataka. Susmita of Divakaruni's *Clothes*³¹ has suddenly lost her husband, an immigrant. This Indian woman shudders to think of a bleak future at home where she will have to wait hand and foot on her in-laws and

remain a bird with wings mercilessly clipped, making flight impossible. She visualizes a future just as unbearable as Javni's and so, like her illiterate and rustic counterpart, she decides to live on her own and face life without meek surrender. Rao's Javni does not kill herself. She decides to earn her living and does. Susmita, uncertain though she is, decides to tackle the West on her own and not let her person and personality be wrapped in the length and folds of a plain white saree, without designs and borders. *Javni* and *Clothes*, despite the difference in the gender of the writers and their time, hold up to view, not in dissimilar manner, a woman's life pattern changing on account of a displacement, a sudden shift from a married status into widowhood and two women's similar ways of tackling their problems boldly. Not too different is Rushdie's Rehana who, in "*Good Advice Is Rarer Than Rubies*", shuns a shift from Lahore to England and stays back to be an ayah or a nanny and live as Rehana and not as somebody's wife.

Rushdie's Rehana finds a friend and advisor in Muhammed Ali just as Mistry's Parsis, well bonded, generally stand by one another. Some years ago newspapers carried the news of an old and lonely English woman lying dead in her room for days till the whining of her pet dog drew the neighbours' attention. The possibility of such an incident taking place in India is much less because of the community life we have and enjoy. And time and again short stories, novels and poems have highlighted this Indian practice of being together and sharing. Nissim Ezekiel's poem *Night of the Scorpion* sees a mother in tremendous pain having been stung by a scorpion. But in her agony she is not alone. All the peasants rush to the hut like a "swarm of flies" to console, advise and philosophize³².

R.K. Narayan's *The Missing Mail*³³ too is in recognition of this bond that brings man close to man. Thanappa, the village postman, is as worried about little Kamakshi's marriage as her parents. Finally Kamakshi is married off and after the much-awaited ceremony Thanappa confesses having withheld telegrams containing the news of a death in the family, in case it postponed or broke off the wedding. The entire village is a family, each man/woman partaking of the joys and sorrows of his/her neighbours.

In Calcutta Lahiri's Bibi Halder, a victim of epilepsy, abandoned by her relatives, finds a new family in the neighbourhood. To set her up someone 'donated a kerosene lamp, another gave her some old mosquito netting and a pair of socks without heels.'³⁴ It is this closeness and warmth that Mrs. Sen fails to find in America. Lahiri's Mrs. Sen, so many miles away from Thanappa's village, misses this camaraderie and solidarity. So nostalgia grips this American settler. America is not like India. Will anyone respond if she shouts? Perhaps. But in India, she tells her eleven-year old listener Eliot, you just raise your voice a bit, or express grief or joy of any kind and one whole neighbourhood and half of another comes to share the news, to help with arrangements.³⁵

Lahiri takes us into the heart of Calcutta just as Mistry, in his *Tales from Firozsha Baag*, brings his readers in contact with Parsi residents in a Bombay apartment block to focus largely on 'the relationships at the heart of this community, their cultural identity and the uniqueness of their community living'.³⁶

Certain scenes seem to have been frozen and preserved and when re-used they leave the reader marvelling at similarities, however insignificant they may seem. Take, for instance, Shamnath's mother in Sahni's story. She is no kin to Shobha's mother who has come to her daughter's house from Arizona in Lahiri's *A Temporary Matter*. In India the old mother, timid and weak, tells her beads and prays for her son's well being. Thousands of miles away Shoba's mother, a working woman, who drives a car and is self-reliant and modern, sets up a shrine in the guest room and prays "twice a day for healthy grandchildren."³⁷ If the 1915-born Khuswant Singh's *The Mark of Vishnu* records Indian superstition and an illiterate Gunga Ram's blind faith that makes him go down on his knees before a wounded cobra and get bitten, the 1967-born Jhumpa Lahiri's characters, with the same kind of superstitious belief, hold a cowhide sandal under the epileptic Bibi's nostrils to stop her paroxysms. If Munshi Premchand's (1880-1937) Seth Chetaram in the story, that translated reads *A Day in the Life of a Debt-collector*, can feel his body "drunk" in the proximity of the voluptuous wife of an ekka-driver, Mistry's (b.1952) middle-aged Rustomji in *Auspicious Occasion* too drools at the sight of his maid Gajra. Time, on these occasions, it may seem, has not quite moved or it is as if situations, incidents, reactions, once used, have been made to pass through a defective photo-copying machine producing near-likeness, nearly erasing the years separating one story from another. It is heartening to read diasporic writing, short stories of the present, Lahiri's Mukherjee's, Mistry's or Divakaruni's, and discover their links with their past. Uma Parameswaran observes that "Indo-Canadians, especially of the second wave, romanticize the past, tending to see no evil and brooking no negative views about their native country".³⁸

A short story writer has a specific role allotted to him, Manjeri Isvaran affirmed in his Preface to *A Madras Admiral*. The writer is to be a "seer" and should be able to "catch" the "eternal in the casual".³⁹ How many have succeeded in doing just this is debatable but the effort has not been negligible. All along its short but evenful journey through decades and through continents the *Indian-English* short story has been highlighting significant moments from Indian life and attracting readers of the West with the promise of transporting them to a region, interesting and exotic and not really known.

We are moving away from the margins. Our writings are in demand and as Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni states, the writers of the diaspora are saying in loud print what 'we have been wanting to say for a long time' and a growing number of American men and women 'who are curious about the foreigners living in their middle – want to read their stories too.'⁴⁰ Marine Budhos agrees. 'There is a kind of hunger for such stories'⁴¹, she says. Not unexpected. According to statistics, in the nineties alone there was a phenomenal 105.87 percent growth of the Indian population in the United States.

India needs to be known and India will have to be made known and certainly not as a land of deserts, elephants, jungles and tigers, of women with bead necklaces round their necks and men with unkempt hair and long beards.⁴² India will have to be made known all over again even to the settlers who, as Budhos explains, are unaware of her growth because the notion of India remains 'frozen in people's minds from when they left.'⁴³ Fortunately for us, the task of *re-establishing* India in the West will now be easier done than said or even imagined. For as Indian writing gets "headier" day by day and our diasporic writers continue winning prestigious awards on foreign soil, the interest in India too is on the rise. British and American Universities, in acknowledgement of this development, as it were, are opening new departments for the study of South Asian Literature in particular. To meet the demand of the reading public, immigrant writers like Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni are on 'research trips' to this country to replenish their stock of both memories and plain facts by observing Indians of the twentyfirst century and making necessary notes on 'the change in lifestyles' of the people of this subcontinent.⁴⁴ Another group that includes the Canada-based Rohinton Mistry is still concentrating largely on Indians in India even though the immediate readers belong to a culture, totally different.

India is now very much in focus and to keep the interest alive the diasporic writers, our writers, continue writing India and presenting Indianness—Indian potential, values, culture—to re-introduce this land of amazing cultural diversity to the West. Extending full support are other immigrants including the India-born Ujjal Dosanjh (the 33rd Premier of the Canadian Province of British Columbia) who has taken the oath of office amidst the sound of Punjabi drums and distribution of Indian sweetmeats,⁴⁵ 'as well as all those who celebrated Diwali'⁴⁶ complete with a bronze statue of Ram, the traditional rangoli, tilak, lighted candles, wick-lamps, scent from incense, sweets and flower garlands and Tony Blair extending greetings, and, for the first time in British history, 'brought a bit of India into the House of Commons'.⁴⁷

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AMITAV GHOSH'S *THE SHADOW LINES* : A RE-VIEW

Debiprasad Bhattacharya

As we concentrate on the narrative of Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*, it appears that in the novel there are two core images, those of the map and the mirror, and memory as a device, inextricably bound up with them.¹ These images enjoy a centric importance of their own because with the help of these images one can easily understand the implication that underlies the narrative and realise the intricacies of relationships both at the personal and at the impersonal levels. In fact, the entire narrative is a construct of memory—the process of recapitulation of the past incidents and situations, objects and figures of diverse interests which crowd the memory of the narrator. In connection with the narrator it may be said that he (the narrator) who introduces himself in terms of the first personal pronoun “I” has hardly been described in concrete and definitive details. Readers are always made to surmise his age, his physical features, because all these are never concertely highlighted but simply thrown into relief by suggestive details. At the beginning of the novel—we read, “Over the years, although I cannot remember when it happened any more than I can remember when I first learnt to tell the time or tie my shoelaces, I have come to believe that I was eight too when Tridib first talked to me about that journey. I remember trying very hard to imagine him back to my age, to reduce his height to mine.....”² (*The Shadow Lines*, p. 3)

The projection of the narrator's personal self into Tridib is deliberately designed. First, by this process one of the important threads of human relationship is established between Tridib and the narrator; secondly, by implication Tridib acts as a mirror to the narrator; and lastly, the vagueness of identity of the narrator is strategically maintained to imply that the narrating self of the narrator is highly de-personalized. Yet the narrator who speaks in term of the personal “I” enjoys the privilege of looking at every experience personally and directly; and by a clever manipulation he is made to play the role of a confidant in whom others confide the secrets of their heart, the intimate details of their personal life. Tridib and the narrator are tied with each other not only by a familial bondage but also by the emotive. This is specifically the reason why despite the age differences, there exists between them an indissoluble link of love, sympathy and understanding. Indeed, it is clear to the readers that nobody understands Tridib better than the narrator himself ; and it is Tridib who kindles the boyhood imagination of the narrator in respect of matters and phenomena which are *inter-national*³. The breaking-up of the word “international” into a hyphenated form is deliberate because it implies the cross-cultural context of the novel; and cross-culturalism functions in two ways in

the novel narrative. First, it presents historicity as one of the important aspects of the novel; and secondly, it seems to signify that the vision of history as it is presented in the novel is identical and different at the same time. It is different because of the differential demographic and geographical contexts, and it is identical because the forces of history, whether it is in connection with India or with England, are not viewed as non-living and impersonal but as living because they are placed against the background of throbbing and pulsating human reality.

In fact, the novel has a large and wide historical backdrop. It begins in the year 1939: ("In 1939 thirteen years before I was born, my father's aunt Mayadebi, went to England with her husband and her son, Tridib") and ends around the years 1964 and 1965 when there were internal political problems followed by the situations of war between India and Pakistan. The forces of history, as they are visualised in the novel, represent the concept of vicissitudes—the rise and fall—the see-saw movement in the destiny of individuals and in the destiny of nation. The interpretation of history which is encompassed by the novelist is rational and modern, since the history of any nation is inextricably bound up with the destiny of individuals who remain very much the indispensable part of history. In this context, the narrator's grandmother is a case in point. She was born in undivided Bengal. She leaves East Bengal much before the historic partition. She settles in Calcutta personally and professionally. Yet, the partition leaves an indelible impression on her personal life and experience, her exclusively private feelings and her responses to the prevailing circumstances of life. Her relation who lives in one of the refugee colonies on the fringes of South Calcutta shows that the history and its forces never stand independent of man. The miserable plight of the family, the corroding poverty of their daily life suggest the adverse impact of the partition to which the uprooted families, once prosperous and affluent, are subject themselves. Through the eyes of the narrator the pathos of the forced eviction from the roots is concretely foregrounded:

"The room was so dark there was a neon light glowing inside although it was midday.....There weren't any more houses behind the building we were in. The ground fell away sharply from the edges of the building and then levelled out into a patchwork of stagnant pools, dotted with islands of low, raised ground. Clinging to these islands were little clumps of shanties, their beaten tin roofs glistening rustily in the midday sun. The pools were black, covered with a sludge so thick, that it had defeated even the ubiquitous carpets of water hyacinth..."⁵

For the relation of 'Thamma' the history in form of the present is never endurable, and past is ever dead, and thus it has not the remotest possibility of re-living into a happy and comfortable present. Jethamoshai of the narrator's grandmother is symbolic in this connection. Apparently he is the helpless victim of the loss of memory- the typical old

age problem. But symbolically, the borderline between past and present is blurred for him perhaps because to that lonely and solitary old man the forces of history are too oppressive and agonising. The grandmother herself as a witness to the historical changes refuses to accept the fact that history is something dynamic and fluid. On her visit to Dhaka the capital of East Pakistan she does not look upon the changing faces of Dhaka life sympathetically. She wants to see the picture of Dhaka as it was in the days of her early youth, and thus she misses out the sweetshop at the corner of the lane, and such other familiar things and objects of her early life.

In fact, in the entire novel history and historical developments are present in minute realistic details. The geographical and the demographic features of Calcutta, London and Dhaka are introduced with unquestionable authenticity. The details of the London map and those of Calcutta and Dhaka are intimated to the readers in a convincing style. One learns of Gol Park, Gariahat Junction, the newly colonised Jodhpur Park and Dhakuria; likewise there is mention of Lymington Road, West Hampstead in London and Dhanmundi in Dhaka.

Memory in this novel as in *The Glass Palace* plays a highly meaningful role. Human memory is always very operative and is constantly in a state of fluidity. The entire novel is a reconstructed vision of the past with the help of memory. Accordingly, the two sections of the novel respectively entitled 'Going Away' and 'Coming Home', are mutually bound up with the recapitulating power of memory. There is a number of passages in the novel which either implicitly or explicitly emphasize the potency of memory. In the first part of the novel the narrator recalls the memory of his Maya-Thakuma: "But still from as far back as I can remember, I have known her, in the secrecy of my mind, as 'Mayadebi'⁶... In the second part the narrator states further, "It was thus sitting in the airconditioned calm of an exclusive library that I began on my strangest journey: a voyage into a land outside space, and expanse without distances; a land of looking-glass events."⁷ In these speculative statements there is the definition of memory that operates at multiple levels. It may be said without any doubt that memory, according to the narrator, is a journey of the mind, the uninterrupted movement of the inner sensibility of the individual—the annihilation of the barriers of time and space—the exploration and exposition of the past, the re-discovery of its meaning in the mirror of the present. Thus going away from places to places signifies movement that may be simultaneously physical and psychological. When Tridib shows the Atlas to the narrator, the narrator's mind works at the imaginative level. In the later phase of his life he remembers his boyhood habits. He has the nostalgic feeling that he has gone away from his boyhood days. Memory thus performs the function of interlacing the different time contexts. As the present is viewed in the perspective of the past the narrator grows wistful in this connection :

When I go past Gol Park now I often wonder whether that would happen today. I don't know, I can't tell: that world is closed to me, sent off by

too many years spent away: Montu went away to America years ago and Nathu Chaubey, I heard, went back to Banaras and started a hotel. When I walk past his paan shop now and look at the crowds thronging through these neon-lit streets, the air-conditioned shops filled with rickety stalls.....at the traffic packed as tight as a mail train all the way to the Dhakuria overbridge, somehow, though the paan-shop hasn't changed, I find myself doubting it.

By way of rumination he recalls "in the early sixties there were so few cars around there that we thought nothing of playing football on the streets around the roundabout-making way occasionally for the number 9, or any other bus that happened to come snorting along. There were only a few scattered shacks on Gariahat Road then put up by the earliest refugee from the east."⁸

The opening sentence of the novel situates the novel against a specificity of time: "In 1939 thirteen years before I was born my father's aunt Mayadebi went to England with her husband and her son Tridib". There is an exactitude in the mention of the chronological year and her 1939 – the time immediately preceding the second World War. War and the reminiscences of war constitute one of the major thematic features of the novel. Apart from the Global War II, there are references to the Chinese aggression, the mini war between India and Pakistan. The narrator's views about nationalism and communalism are unambiguous. The Muslim's hatred for the Hindu and vice-versa reveal the orthodoxy and religious fundamentalism of both the communities and as, Amitav Ghosh suggests, this has also coloured the political outlook, the area of diplomacy between the two nations. The loss of Muri-Mubarak – an instance of heinous conspiracy in politics to gain the greater advantage – is startegically devised to instigate and fan the anti -Hindu feelings and sentiments. The feeling of communal animosity is so intense that even the narrator's Muslim friend, Montu, is viewed in a suspicious light when there is a minor riot in Calcutta in 1964. The spirit of intolerance is as intensely conceived in connection with the Hindu community as it is in Khulna with the Muslims, and one remembers how Tridib faces a tragic helpless death in the hands of the frenzied, orthodox and fundamentalist Mohammedans in Khulna. The spirit of intolerance – the poison of communalism – thus infects the forces of history. Amitav Ghosh's presentation of history in *The Shadow Lines* is thus fairly comprehensive and non-prejudicial.

II

In the novel, memory is two-dimensional – private and public. Public memory has something to do with the presentation of minor historical details, based mainly on the

newspaper reports, as in the following passage:

“Long after he had gone it occurred to me that newspapers carry the news a day late. I turned the pages to the edition of Saturday, 11 January, 1964, and sure enough, there it was: a huge banner headline which said: *Curfew in Calcutta, Police Open Fire, 10 Dead, 15 Wounded* Indistinctly, through the white haze that was swirling before my eyes, I noticed another headline, at the bottom of the page. It said : *Kunderan's day at Madras, Unbeaten 170 in first Test.* And right above it was a tiny little box item in bold print, with the headline: *Sacred relic reinstalled*,¹⁰.

It may be important to note down the significance of the subtitles of the two parts of the novel and the mutual relation that prevails between them. The first section- ‘Going Away’- stands in sharp contrast to ‘Coming Home’ which is the sub-title of the second. ‘Going Away’ suggests the temporary farewell to home, to the root which is social and cultural at the same time. It may signify the non-Indianisation of Indian culture. Tridib, Mayadebi for a temporary spell of time cut themselves off from the native country of their own, and try to adjust themselves to a new culture and tradition. It is a journey from the east to the west; on the contrary ‘Coming Home’, the sub-title of the second part, suggests the reversal of their journey from the west to the east. The ‘home’ image in the subtitle signifies ‘domesticity’, the culture, homogeneity, the root and room of one’s own. The narrator’s grandmother attempts to revive the home of her own in order to relive her girlhood days and her early youth. She attempts to redefine her identity, social and cultural. That is why her ancestral home in Dhaka bears a special connotation. For her relation uprooted from her native soil, home is non-existent. The semblance of home in the refugee colony signifies social ignominy and degradation. It also stands for the destabilisation in the social hierarchy, the self transference from the core to the margin of the society. It is significant to note that home can be simultaneously consoling and dangerous. To the narrator himself coming-home is a consoling proposition, while to Tridib home proves fatally dangerous because the incident of his tragic death takes place on the Indian subcontinent.

The search for one’s root and the quest for the personal and familial identity form one of the important subtexts of the novel. It may be argued that in the final analysis *The Shadow Lines* is the document of human relationship at the different levels, spanning over three generations of the Dutta-Chowdhuri family. The novelist registers the fragmentation of a large joint family into small units. The figure of Jethamashai with memory and sensibility getting deranged and disorderly is a living metaphor of this process of disintegration. The shadow lines of disharmony and disintegration are drawn at the level of personal relationships between Tridib and May, Ila and the narrator, the narrator’s grandmother and his mother. But the title bears a profoundly greater implication because

it reminds one of a number of meaningful statements about the predicament and spiritual crisis of modern man.

“Between the idea
And the reality
Between the motion
And the act
Falls the shadow
Between the conception
And the creation
Between the emotion
And the response
Falls the shadow”

Notes and Reference :

1. The idea is borrowed from Mukherjee, Meenakshi, *Maps and Mirrors : Co-ordinates of Meaning in The Shadow Lines*
2. The Shadow Lines, p.3
3. The ideas occur in Kaul, A.K., *A Reading of The Shadow Lines*
4. *The Shadow Lines*, p. 3
5. Ibid, pp 132--133
6. Ibid, p. 3
7. Ibid, p. 224.
8. Ibid, pp. 7--8
9. Ibid, p.3.
10. Ibid, p. 224.
11. Eliot, T.S., 'The Hollow Men', *Selected Poems*, Faber and Faber, London, 1967, p. 80.

All critical references and textual quotations are taken from Amitav Ghosh , *The Shadows Lines*, OUP, 1995.



JHUMPA LAHIRI AND THE MALADIES OF INTERPRETATION

Sanjukta Das

A review of *English and the Indian Short Story*, a book of essays presented at a seminar held at the University of Hyderabad and dealing with 'the impressive body of short story writing in English by Indians (both in India and the diaspora)' points out that the neglect of Jhumpa Lahiri is glaring. Lahiri's central concern as we know is the Indian (more specifically Bengali) diasporic experience.¹

Indeed not just in this book/seminar, but in prevalent discussions of Indian English/Post-colonial/Diasporic literature, conducted in English in India today, the neglect of Jhumpa Lahiri stands out.

Not even the Pulitzer could install this writer in the firmament of the critical establishment. This paper takes a look at the disappearance of this author and posits a couple of reasons for this state of affairs. In the process it examines current labels of 'Indian English', 'Post-colonial' and 'Diasporic' to categorize the work of Indian writers in the English language.

Indians, even Bengalis had not heard of Jhumpa Lahiri until she was awarded the Pulitzer Prize. The average Indian is familiar with the Nobel and thanks to Rushdie and Roy with the Booker Prize. However, to judge by the coverage Lahiri received in Calcutta newspapers, Bengalis were happy for this 'daughter of Bengal'. But this too was short lived. A few months after the Prize, Jhumpa Lahiri arrived in Calcutta to wed her American fiancé according to Bengali rites. The hide-and-seek game with the media that ensued, along with stories in the Bengali Press about the lavish ethnic designer wedding-wear, prompted prominent best selling Bengali author Shuchitra Bhattacharya to voice her opinion on the current trend of 'packaging' Indian writers in English.² After that Jhumpa Lahiri simply ceased to exist.

The highest tribute too came not from the English Press but the Bengali one. *Desh* the leading Bengali literary journal placed her in a hundred-year old tradition of Bengali short stories!³ This article looked not at the linguistic medium she was using but at the Bengali mind behind it. This edition of *Desh* also carried an article on the multiculturalism of the American society. The other Pulitzer Winners of the past include Jews, Blacks and Americans of various ethnic origins. But then *Desh*⁴ has a tradition of carrying discussions on English, Latin American and other foreign language writing, unlike the English Press in India which ignores vernacular writing except the occasional English translation.⁵

On the other hand, Indian English writers from America rarely find mention in anthologies of Indian English writing. Thus Bharati Mukherjee does not figure in most anthologies and discussions, not even in the encyclopaedic *Cambridge Guide to Literature in English*.⁶ And *The Oxford Guide to Contemporary World Literatures*⁷ which has chapters devoted to most countries of the world features Mukherjee under both Indian writing as well as writing from the USA. It must be mentioned here that the chapter on Indian writing features only Indian English writing, whereas other countries are represented even by those vernacular texts which have no English translation. Given this 'lie of the land'⁸ it then seems that the absence of Jhumpa Lahiri from the field of critical discourse is a malady that has more to do with the diagnostic tools of interpretation than with her stories.

America gave this author its highest literary award, *Desh* placed her in the tradition of Bengali Literature and the Indian English establishment continues to ignore her. Even outside academia *The God of Small Things* sells more than *Interpreter of Maladies*. The answer really lies in Lahiri's unique inheritance. For although a second generation American, Lahiri is more Bengali than many Bengalis born and bred in India for whom English rather than the mother tongue is the primary language of reading and writing. The little boy Sandeep in Amit Chaudhuri's *A Strange and Sublime Address*,

Brought up in Bombay, away from his own province, Bengal, was one of the innumerable language orphans of modern India.⁹

On a visit to Calcutta, Sandeep looks at the alphabets of his mother tongue and regards their shape with the imaginativeness of unfamiliarity. It is ironical that in Lahiri's short story 'Sexy', the young American woman Miranda stares in the same way at the Bengali alphabet in a book she buys at a New York store in order to know her Bengali lover better.

Lahiri's Bengali inheritance derives not only from her immigrant parents' nostalgia but also from her own engagement with Bengali literature. The reach of this influence is discussed in this essay to highlight the reason for the erasure of Jhumpa Lahiri from the discourse on Indian English writing : a discourse that is flawed by its derivative relation to postmodernist theory and the West. As Meenakshi Mukherjee states in a recent interview:

Post-Colonialism seemed very enabling when it first started, when it brought us centre-stage. At the same time, Post-Colonialism did not begin in academies that were Post-Colonial and therefore the institutional space from where it is emerging is very important to

consider. We are in another country, another milieu and location — Post-Colonialism is something we have to review and see how much it is useful to us. For example Post-Colonial criticism of the kind that is fashionable today valorizes hybridity, marginalisation, dislocation, and only texts which have these qualities get talked about — whereas in India, we know a great deal of writing in English and more so in Indian languages are not necessarily dislocated. They have a continuity, they are not hybrid in the same way that dislocated people become hybrid. These books are not getting talked about because they don't fall into the paradigm that Post-Colonialism sets up.¹⁰

In Lahiri's stories characters integrate with others and within themselves rather than disintegrate. The opening story, 'A Temporary Matter', underlines dislocation as a temporary matter. During a power-cut while lines are being repaired, Shoba and Shukumar, a young Bengali couple in Boston use the darkness to make certain confessions to each other. Following a miscarriage, Shoba had withdrawn into silence. And now after playing the confession game over a few successive evenings, she announces to her husband that she has found a new apartment and will be moving out. Then Shukumar tells her what he had promised never to tell her — that he had not been in Baltimore when it had happened, that he had come and seen their dead baby, that it been a boy and that he had held him before he was cremated. Now a dam bursts and 'They wept together, for the things they now knew.' What is interesting in this story is the little background detail of a white couple, neighbours, as they pass and repass Shoba and Shukumar's darkened house.

A small parade of neighbours passed by with flashlights.

"We're going to the bookstore to browse", a silver-haired man called out. He was walking with his wife, a thin woman in a windbreaker, and holding a dog on a leash. They were the Bradfords, and they had tucked a sympathy card into Shoba and Shukumar's mailbox back in September. "I hear they've got their power", "They'd better", Shukumar said, "or you'd be browsing in the dark". The woman laughed, slipping her arm through the crook of her husband's elbow. "Won't you join us?"

At the end of the story, when it seems to be all over between him and Shoba, Shukumar carries the empty dinner plates to the sink and looks out of the window.

Outside the evening was still warm, and the Bradfords were walking arm in arm. As he watched the couple the room went dark, and he spun around.....

This story sets the tone for the rest of the book—maladies that do not persist but heal. This is an America that is markedly different from Bharati Mukherjee's America. Here elderly couples walk hand in hand and are in perfect sympathy and harmony with their neighbours. In this world, to be somewhat dissociated from certain aspects of one's native culture is not loaded with significance, but only normal.

As a second generation American, Shukumar hadn't spent as much time in India as Shoba had. His parents who settled in New Hampshire used to go back without him. The first time he'd gone as an infant he'd nearly died of amoebic dysentery.

Shukumar meets Shoba at

a lecture hall in Cambridge, where a group of Bengali poets were giving a recital.....Shukumar was soon bored; he was unable to decipher the literary diction, and couldn't join the rest of the audience as they sighed and nodded solemnly after certain phrases.

The statement is not developed into a socio-cultural pronouncement on diaspora or alienation. It is put in perspective against a larger backdrop of diversities, into which it blends.

Peering at the newspaper folded in his lap, he (Shukumar) studied the temperature of cities around the world. Ninety one degrees in Singapore yesterday, fifty one in Stockholm.

Differences of culture and personality are shown to be overcome and not played up. 'This Blessed House' shows Sanjeev, a young immigrant with somewhat conservative ideas confronted by his charming, reckless, second-generation American Bengali wife. As they discover a series of Christian paraphernalia tucked away by the previous tenants in odd corners of their new home, Sanjeev is exasperated by his wife Twinkle's delight and appropriation of these objects. The last of these is,

a solid silver bust of Christ, the head easily three times the size of his ownHe hated its immensity, and its flawless polished surface, and its undeniable value. He hated that it was in his house, and that he owned it. Unlike the other things that they had found, this contained dignity, solemnity, beauty even. Most of all he hated it because he knew that Twinkle loved it.

Yet his concern for her triumphs over all the hate and he carries it for her.

Sanjeev pressed the massive silver face to his ribs.....and followed her.

Hybridity and dislocation are thus gently healed back into wholeness. Change and difference are absorbed and accommodated, not underlined as an immutable condition. What emerges at the end of her stories is the human being and not a strident and shrill

ethnic or national identity. For although most of the stories are about Bengalis, the collection is not really about a community in diaspora in the sense that Anita Desai's *Bye Bye Blackbird* is. Nor is it about being Indian in the sense that Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* is. Historical events and processes do figure in the narratives but Lahiri uses them differently. The contrast with the diasporic experiences delineated by Bharati Mukherjee (*Jasmine, Wife, The Middleman and other Stories*) or by Anita Desai (*Fasting, Feasting*) is evidence of Lahiri's second generation at-homeness in America.

Lahiri's characters keep going to the map, trying to understand distances and differences only to find them misleading and inadequate. All attempts to study history and geography and foreign cultures make things more perplexing. The only way people make sense of things is through personal relation. In the story 'When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dinner' little Lilia can no longer relate to her American History lessons after the carnage in East Pakistan enters her life and her living room through Mr. Pirzada and the television. She strays into a different section of the school library and brings out a book marked 'Asia'. She is troubled by her own history which is definitely not part of the curriculum. But like a real child she is at the same time engaged in the excitement of Halloween with her American friend. In 'Interpreter of Maladies' the placid surface of an Indian American family's tourist-map driven sightseeing is rent apart by the wife's intimate confessions to the tourist guide, and by an encounter with monkeys. In 'Sexy' Dev shows Miranda a map in a copy of *The Economist*, to point out his native Bengal. Their visit to the Mapparium at the Christian Science Centre where they can walk inside a globe and see the countries painted all around them does not make much sense as many of the countries' names have changed. Later she meets Rohin who, parrot-like, rattles off names of countries and their capitals even as his own parents' marriage is threatened by his Indian father falling in love with a white woman on a flight from Delhi to Montreal. The pictorial simplicity of maps tantalizes and baffles. In the Pirzada story the American freedom trail and the world map showing India are equally inadequate for Lilia's comprehension.

The shadow lines¹¹ of maps finds its annulment in the title of the story 'The Third and Final Continent' where the third continent is not just America after India and Europe for the young Bengali migrant but a human space where persons are in perfect accord. It is a space where a hundred-and-three year old American woman may act as a catalyst in the relationship of a young Bengali couple who are strangers yet in an arranged marriage.

In reaching this final continent, Lahiri's characters stand apart from the fragmented alienated souls that people so much of modern Indian writing in English. Even in a story

('When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dinner') set against the lacerating fissures of war, genocide, the birth of a new nation, of international politics and America's support to the other side, the overarching vision is one of human sympathy and bond. The sub-title of her collection in the Indian edition, 'bengal, boston and beyond' blurs the notion of geographical identities. Here is wholeness of vision that sees Indians through American eyes, and Americans through Indian ones. In the process differences are not denied but brought into the texture of a totality of human experience.

The same vision marks Lahiri's narrative style — calm, simple, linear and factual in the fictional tradition of an earlier age. The stories have a beginning, a middle and an end. Things do not fall apart here, despite miscarriages, illegitimate offspring ('Interpreter of Maladies'), wars, adultery, accidents, and marriages teetering on the edge of uncertainty. In contrast, Arundhati Roy's prose bristles with subversive options and attitudes. Lahiri's characters are etched in terms of their private relationships. Ashapura Debi, on whom Lahiri wrote a dissertation at her American University, had written about ordinary human beings in their day-to-day living. It is a style and vision that exists in other vernacular women's narratives. As an essay on Quarratalain Haider, Krishna Sobti and Nayantara Sehgal states, it is a 'feminization of history,' by which is meant not 'an ideologically directed conceptualisation of history' but

an attempt to understand the dislocation of social relationships. The conventional divisions between the male and female, between culture and nature are employed, not to reinforce these divisions, but to demonstrate how their boundaries are blurred ¹²

Lahiri's Bengali literary heritage is manifest in other aspects too. The Pirzada story is a brilliant reworking of Tagore's 'Kabuliwallah'. A little girl is befriended by a man exiled from his own daughter, bearing sweets and the sense of a distant land and culture. The antics of Tagore's Mini become Lilia's Halloween masquerade. But whereas Tagore's Mini had redrawn the borders as part of the passage to adulthood, Lahiri's Lilia retains the intensity of that childhood feeling for Mr. Pirzada's children. Like the sweets that dissolve in Lilia's mouth, the vicious circle of international politics is brought into Lahiri's story and melted down to its essential human dimension. 'Mrs Sen' and 'The Interpreter of Maladies' show married women unburdening their hearts to passive yet sympathetic

listeners — a motif common in early twentieth century Bengali fiction, eg., Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay's *Sreekanto* or Tagore's *Nashta Nir*. But again in Lahiri's case the passive helplessness of the two listeners, and the brief circumscribed confessions mark them as maladies and not tragedies. 'A Real Durwan', about a destitute old woman confronted by a ruthless set of residents, or 'The Treatment of Bibi Haldar', an unmarried woman's journey to a home and hearth, narrated by the neighbourhood women, depict an Ashapura-like world of clamorous middle class female voices and values. Conjugal love is shown to prevail, at least for the Indian women. In fact 'Sexy' is a sensitive assertion of the family as an institution. These echoes from an earlier Bengali fictional tradition are anachronisms in the contemporary Bengali literary landscape dominated by images of alienation, discord and despair. In that sense Lahiri is caught in a time warp vis-a-vis India, a probable reason why, after the initial curiosity, the Bengali reader found her stories unexciting. In America where these stories first appeared they would be regarded differently against their own fictional tradition.

With the exception of 'A Real Durwan', the community is shown to be a healing presence. This emphasis on human understanding across barriers of unfamiliarity, across distances of time and space is nineteenth century and Arnoldian —

'For surely once, they feel, we were

Parts of a single continent'.¹³

As a second generation Indian American Lahiri is heir to an India mediated through her parents' nostalgia and through the vernacular literature of her parents' time without identifying with the modernist angst of first generation immigrants. She has, therefore, drawn on a different quality of experience, avoiding what many Indian English writers have done, —

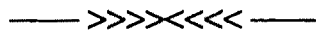
'successfully manipulated western forms, fabulist narratives and a post-modernist mode with local legends and popular fables as a means of mythicizing contemporary reality.'

Nor has she used Indianness as a trope.¹⁴

In pre-eleventh-September America, being Indian or Asian perhaps did not mean what it often means in a colonial or post-colonial context. But as Lahiri dispenses with the markers of history, geography and other labels and gets down to the simple daily acts of human beings, her stories promise to survive literary fashions of the moment.

Notes & References :

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2. Rabibasariya, Ananda Bazar Patrika. 25th Feb. 2001, p.1.
3. 'Shailajananda theke Jhumpa; Ek Shatoker Jiban Darpan', *Desh*, 29th April 2000.
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5. 'From the Perspective of an Indian Writer in Diaspora', Protiva Sen Memorial Lecture delivered by Ketaki Kushari Dyson on 15th Feb. 2002 at Asutosh Memorial Hall, Calcutta. See my report in Salil Biswas, ed., *Pegasus* Vol. 1, No. 8, Kolkata, March 2002, p.8.
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7. John Sturrock, ed., Oxford University Press, New York, 1997.
8. I deliberately use this phrase from the title of *The Lie of the Land : English Literary Studies in India*, ed., Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1993.
9. *A Strange and Sublime Address*, Amit Chaudhuri, Mandarin Paperbacks, London, 1992, pp. 80-81.
10. 'Beyond Literary Ventriloquism', Interview with Professor Meenakshi Mukherjee, The Sunday Statesman, Literary, 15th September 2002. p.3.
11. This perspective on the Bangladesh war documented in *The Shadow Lines* by Amitav Ghosh is discussed in 'Maps and Mirrors' in *The Perishable Empire*. p. 134-148.
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14. *The Perishable Empire*, p. 180-181.



FROM PAGE TO SCREEN : MICHAEL ONDAATJE'S *THE ENGLISH PATIENT* AS FICTION AND FILM

Somdatta Mandal

Let me begin with the description of a scene:

"Is there anybody from Picton?"

The frail voice belongs to a young Canadian soldier who lies mortally wounded in a field hospital in Italy. It is 1944, close to the ragged end of the Second World War. The body is a mess of blood, and he knows he is about to die.

"Why Picton?" asks the nurse.

"He's from there," says the doctor. "Edge of Lake Ontario, right, soldier?"

This scene, from the opening sequence of the film *The English Patient* is a poignant one. But for a Canadian viewer, it carries an added element of sentiment. One is not used to seeing Canadians fight wars and talk about places like Picton in the movies — especially not in sweeping epics nominated and selected for nine Academy Awards. *The English Patient* is not a Canadian movie. But it is based on a Canadian novel, the 1992 Booker Prize winner by Michael Ondaatje¹. Two of its lead characters are from Montreal—even if they are played by a European (Juliette Binoche) and an American (Willem Dafoe). And the story, a multicultural narrative set on the quicksand frontiers of love and war, questions brute patriotism with a poetic intelligence that seems in the end both postcolonial and also distinctly Canadian. It is about *identity*.

The relation between literature and film has, in recent years, become the object of increased attention among practitioners of both the art forms. This interrelation, deeply related to the modernist world-view, finds fascinating expression through the works of modern literateurs, both for those who argue for the distinction of the two media as well as for those who believe that the two genres are parallel and analogous. In discussing the aesthetics of film adaptation, the basic question pertains to what the literary text gains or loses in the process of celluloid transposition. This paper proposes to analyse the 1992 novel *The English Patient* and its Oscar winning 1997 film version directed by Anthony Minghella in the light of the problem of adaptation. The history of Hollywood is full of writers made bitter by watching their work mangled onscreen. Michael Ondaatje is not one of them. He is so enamoured of the screen version of his novel that he's been on a multi-continent promotional tour. He and the writer-director have even done readings together, performing scenes from the novel and film script. While Minghella wrote the screenplay, the two men and producer Saul Zaentz debated everything from the music to

the heroine's hairstyle. But ultimately, the movie was Minghella's, and Ondaatje clearly viewed it as a minor miracle. "What Anthony did was incredible," he said. "He had to make it completely different, but it seems to be the same."² Because Ondaatje was himself deeply involved in the creation and promotion of this film—which has a more straight-forward plot explication than the original polyphonic story—the case becomes more interesting. It is one of the few cases of adaptation which is brilliant in its execution, one which the author actually praises in a prologue to the published script.³ Both men have nothing but admiration for each other, and for anyone interested in filmmaking, scriptwriting, adaptations, or just a good read, it serves as a rare phenomenon. Indeed, one might also argue that the film is not so much of an adaptation, but rather a transformation of the novel, a set of variations on a number of fictional themes and structures.

The English Patient grew from an account of a German spy who infiltrated Cairo with the help of an old desert hand. Ondaatje began reading texts by 1930s explorers in North Africa—men who were oblivious to politics. "These were guys who were obsessed with the surface of the earth," he said. "A civil war could be breaking out 10 miles away, and they're trying to find the right fossil." In descriptive prose of spectacular beauty, he invents a desert world which is both physical and imaginative, resulting in a fiction which "grows out of facts." Refusing to be shackled by the traditions of narrative, character and plot, in the novel Ondaatje assembled mosaic-fashion the lives of four shell-shocked occupants of an Italian villa near Florence at the end of the Second World War. The war-damaged Villa San Girolamo, its grounds strewn with mines, has gone from German stronghold to Allied hospital, its sole occupants now a young Canadian nurse, Hana, and her last patient, a man burned beyond recognition, who drifts in and out of his own memories and dreams. Into their lives comes David Caravaggio, an Italian-Canadian friend of Hana's father but also a thief who has been used by Western intelligence, tortured and maimed by wartime inquisitors, and Kip (Kirpal Singh), a young Indian sapper in the British Army. So, the central story revolves around a dying man and two wrecks—for David has become a morphine addict after his recent capture and torture, while Hana, who coped with the loss of her solidier sweetheart and their child (aborted), has been undone by news of her father's death. Only Kip functions efficiently, defusing the land mines. Ondaatje superimposes on this tableau the landscape of the pre-war North African desert as well as Cairo, with its strange brotherhood of Western explorers, spying, Bedouin healing practices, early aviation—everything filtered through the consciousness of Hana's patient. Though he claims to have forgotten his identity during the fiery fall from his plane into the desert, it seems the putative Englishman is the Hungarian explorer (and sometime German spy) Count de Almásy; but such puzzles count for less than his erudition (his beloved Herodotus is the novel's presiding spirit), his internationalism ("Erase nations!" (139), and his doomed but incandescent love affair with Katharine, the bride of

an English explorer—an affair ignited by the desert and Herodotus, and a dramatic contrast to the "formal celibacy" of the love developing at the villa between Hana and Kip, which ends (crudely) when Kip learns of the Hiroshima bombing, discovers his racial identity, and quits the white man's war. Each of the characters is haunted by the riddle of the English patient, the nameless burn victim who lies in an upstairs room and whose memories of passion, betrayal, and rescue illuminate the book like flashes of heat lightning. Ondaatje himself admitted to Margaria Fichtner that his problem was that he did not really 'have an exact plot' :

My idea of a novel is that you're really sort of discovering rather than telling it. You pick up a fragment, or you pick up a remnant of a situation, and you start exploring it or looking into what it meant: A plane crash in a desert. Who is this person? When is it happening? I think there's always that sense of trying to unearth or clarify something. And even when you're into the book a couple of years, you are still in that kind of state of just receiving or discovering all kinds of things. Any fragment of a newspaper or something someone tells you or an emotion will do. It is a sort of not knowing what's in a dark room, and you strike a match. If I know what I was going to write about, I would be completely bored.....It's not like I'm obsessing: "Today I'm going to learn about this or that." It's much more whimsical. I didn't know there was going to be a lot of bomb stuff in *The English Patient*, so when (the Indian sapper) Kip came into the story, I thought "Oh, this is kind of interesting. Who is this man? Is he going to be in the book for long? It's a case of keeping as open as possible to the time."⁴

In the 'acknowledgements' section of his work Ondaatje mentions a long list of books which were important to him for his research. Yet he specifically mentions the fictional quality of it also, proving that private passions trump politics in all his novels, whether the obsession is the desert or a woman :

While some of the characters who appear in this book are based on historical figures, and while many of the areas described—such as the Gif Kebir and its surrounding desert exist, and were explored in the 1930s, it is important to stress that this story is a fiction and that the portraits of the characters who appear in it are fictional, as are some of the events and journeys.⁵

In the novel, time is often recalled as a place. The unnamed 'English patient' dips into his well of memory and tells "stories.....which slip from level to level". His notebook is a copy, an English translation of *The Histories* by Herodotus to which he has added,

"cutting and glueing in pages from other books or writing his own observations" (16), proving that Herodotus's text is not fixed for him. Hana, too, is unconstrained by the static text and writes her thoughts in the blank pages of books and then hides them in the high shelves of the villa's library. She reads aloud to the English patient in the evening, unconcerned with chronology or continuity. "She simply brought out the book and said 'page ninety-six' or 'page one hundred eleven.' That was the only locator." (8)

The film version of *The English Patient* as expected, differs from the novel in various aspects and drives at the heart of human motivation. Trying to give form to action, the story of the burned patient unfolds with a striking juxtaposition with the present. Despite some obvious stage shots, the beauty of the film is the method of telling the story. Relying very much on a sense of mystery—it is told in flashback, revealing bits of the story to the viewer a little at a time. Unlike the book which is not about plot at all, but more a series of flowing images than a coherent story line, much of the enjoyment of the movie stems from wondering who the characters are and what events led them to where they are, and discovering the answers a piece at a time. When Ondaatje was asked by the *SALON* interviewer⁶ what he felt when such a polyphonic story with multiple central characters was made into a film with a more straightforward plot explication, he replied:

I trust his (Minghella's) directorial instincts. And I don't know film. I do know that film is much more visceral, in terms of its effect on the reader. It's much more immediate, and because of that it seems to be limited in a specific place. If a stranger dies in a movie, it doesn't really affect us as much as someone we've followed for an hour and a half. Whereas in a book, you can invent a stranger on the last five pages of a novel, and give that enough empathy for the reader to be devastated. I think that is one of the differences between film and books that is very interesting. In a book, you can suddenly leap to another world and bring that world into that room. So the choices made here aren't so much about the politics of the movie-makers, they're about the technical limits of film—a medium that can also give us something quite devastating by saying less.

When Ondaatje was asked if he felt it can be considered a Canadian movie, he told *Maclean's*, "I hope so."⁷ With an American producer, and English director and an international cast, the film "really was a mongrel stew," he said. "I'm rather startled that the Canadianness survived to some extent, and I was always glad that that was there—even if Toronto was just mentioned in a torture scene."⁸ Still, the triumph of *The English Patient* raises some questions. There was even a hint of controversy, with charges that the movie glossed over the Nazi past of the historical figure who inspired the hero, Count Laszlo de Almásy.

According to Raymond Aaron Younis⁹ the differences between the novel and the film can be broadly classified under three areas, namely (a) the story of Katharine and Hana, (b) The English Patient and the Other and (c) A Story of Two Endings. Firstly, the film reverses the order of importance in relation to the two women. In the novel, Hana is the dominant character along with her patient—and it is crucial that he is *her* patient in a literal and metaphorical sense: she cares for him, and the reader is encouraged by the narrator to wonder why she has taken upon herself this unenviable task; but he is also the catalyst of a number of crucial changes in her own life. The novel suggests that her growth and compassion, and her quest for a symbolic connection with the absent and painful figure of the father, are at the heart of the story. The film, on the other hand, simplifies her story considerably: the major point in the film is that she is motivated by the fact that she is a nurse. Many of the complexities and ambiguities that are apparent in the book disappear. When asked by an interviewer why unlike in the novel, Hana is a simpler and less damaged character and her redemption is easier in the film, Ondaatje replied that "the healing in the book takes much longer—there's a sense of history, which a book can catch, but a film almost can't." Since the director decided to make the film into a love story with many melodramatic elements, Katharine is introduced much earlier and developed much more as an individual character. Unlike the shadowy and intriguing figure of the novel, here she is a much more dominant, passionate, beautiful and distinctive character who commands Almasi's (and as a consequence, the viewer's) full attention. The film also highlights her love and death to a striking degree: the most passionate music is reserved for her scenes with Almasi; many of the most dramatic shots (Almasi lifting her from the shattered plane; carrying her to the Cave, leaving her, and returning to her belatedly), and many of the most poignant scenes in the film involve her. She is a fully realized romantic melodramatic figure: she falls in love with another man, commits adultery, and in conventional melodramatic mode is made to suffer terribly for her transgressions and for her adulterous and passionate desire—just as her lover suffers terribly because of his love for her, and his associations with her.

The second major digression in the film occurs when the image of the Patient himself is changed to a remarkable degree — possibly dictated by the demands of melodrama and the visual requirements of the medium. The novel emphasizes the Patient as a figure who has no fixed identity : his identities - count, lover, spy, geographer, loner, poet and so on - are fleeting, fluid and difficult to pin down. His "facelessness" is another importance attribute of his multiple identities. In the film, his face expresses emotions such as sorrow or grief in relation to his past, or gladness and relief in relation to the treatment he receives from his nurse and the camera highlights a number of these in close-up. He does have a face and it registers many emotions because the film is not as concerned with the notion of shifting identities and because the dramatic possibilities are far greater in visual

and cinematic terms if the Patient can show emotions. Also, the tragedy of the lovers in the film would have been undermined perhaps by the union of an English woman and a committed German spy and hence the issue that he is a spy is deliberately glossed over, probably with the intention of making a male lover as attractive and not as suspicious as possible. As a consequence, Almasy is a figure who is ennobled, again in true melodramatic fashion, by the nature of his sacrifice. The audience, of course, warms to him even *more*, and as a consequence, feels *more* sad—more intense emotion—when his relationship with Katharine ends with her death. Once again, this is a good example of how the demands of the genre and of the medium transform the contents of the fiction.

It is also interesting to note that Kip's role, as a wanderer and an outsider, which is quite crucial in the novel is very much diminished in the film. His role in the book is quite crucial for his career serves to highlight the not entirely harmonious relationship between the British for whom he works and the colonized land from whence he came: he belongs to two worlds, in a sense, and yet is still an outsider (271), a wanderer (270). In other words, the novel focuses on the issue of the cultural hybrid with his mixed loyalties and the dual cultures to which he belongs, in order to show perhaps that such cross-cultural relationships are not necessarily reducible to black and white terms or to traditional binaries such as oppressor and oppressed, colonizer and colonized. If he can be called an "other" in the novel in the sense that he represents the sometimes harmonious, sometimes troubled, attempt to integrate or combine different aspects of a complex self (trained soldier, loyal serviceman, hero, lover, subaltern, and so on), then his role in the film is more simple. He provides the love interest in relation to Hana and does his duty for the military. The troubled cross-cultural relationship evoked so vividly in the book is all but lost, perhaps because these issues would detract from the primacy of the love stories in the film, or perhaps because the traumas of decolonization and uprootedness are so disquieting that they may turn audiences away at the box office. (Or more cynically, perhaps these issues are too peripheral or too alienating to merit inclusion in a film which insistently draws attention to the lovers and their adulterous relationship in the desert or in the ruins of Italy.)

The end of the film is notable partly because it differs so substantially from the end of the novel. The film ends with a shot of Hana striding purposefully along a road that leads away from the architectural ruins in which she had completed her duty of care to the patient and this lovely blurred green flashing after that unforgettable shot of the plane over the desert. This is a striking affirming image, the sun is shining (a transparent melodramatic-symbolic element): she seems confident, assured and crucially, she seems to have been healed, so to speak. It gives the viewer every reason to believe that the future will be better than the past which it has recorded, And she is alone; she strides out alone toward an unclear destination (from the viewer's point of view). It is as if the film is insisting on her independence at last. The novel does not end like this at all. It affirms a mysterious connection across space and time between Kip and Hana:

And so Hana moves and her face turns and in a regret she lowers her hair. Her shoulder touches the edge of a cupboard and a glass dislodges. Kirpal's left hand swoops down and catches the dropped fork an inch from the floor and gently passes it into the fingers of his daughter, a wrinkle at the edge of his eyes behind his spectacles (301-02).

Here the two lives seem to have developed independently of one another. Kip is married and successful and Hana is abroad. However, the novel insists on their unbroken connection in symbolic terms—there seems to be an implied continuity between the glass which is dislodged and the fork which is falling, and between the act of dislodging the glass and the act of swooping down and collecting the dropped fork. Perhaps Ondaatje is suggesting that this is the consequence of their earlier union or that there is something mysterious between them which the passage of years or of time cannot destroy; or perhaps he is suggesting that their relationship did not, or cannot, end with their physical separation. The novelist had confided to his interviewer Gary Kamiya that he "didn't know how to end the book" :

I end up with someone dropping a fork in Canada and somebody catching a fork in India. But I thought the stroke of genius in the film was that little girl in the back of the truck, this kid watching. Everything that Hana has been is passed to that little kid, and when she's twenty years old, she's going to remember that ride in the truck and that woman who got on the truck with her. I thought that was such a wonder, it was so brief, but that was the open door to the continuation of some kind of future. How do you do that in book? God knows. You can't get to that doorway. That's an example of how film can do some stuff that books can't.¹⁰

Apart from the mere cataloguing of differences between the novel and the film, it is more worthwhile to try and trace out certain reasons why such transformations occur. Though film theorists as well as literary critics constantly dwell upon the interrelationship between the two art forms of literature and film, they also make us aware that both are not the same medium. Thus the controversy about the relationship between novel and the film is perhaps a hundred years old, beginning right from the early days of cinematographic history. Though ideally the novel and the film should be regarded as independent entities, several critics have harped upon the question of narrativity and fidelity to the text. Geoffrey Wagner¹¹, for example, divided film adaptation into three "modes" : the *transposition* in which a novel is directly given on the screen with a minimum of apparent interference; the *commentary*, where an original story is taken and either purposely or inadvertently altered in some respect; the *analogy*, which must represent a

considerable departure for the sake of making another work of art. According to the French critic, Jean Mitry¹², "a novel is a narrative that organizes itself into a world, a film is a world that organizes itself into a narrative." Mitry argues that the adaptation of a novel to film rests on the absurd assumption that there exists a content which can be transformed from one form of expression to another. But in art, the content does not exist apart from its form. A change of form, therefore, results in another content. In short, adaptations result in different things. Whenever a viewer goes to see a movie made from a famous novel, he/she is invariably led to expect a literal transcription to follow, and because most of the time his/her expectations are not met, he/she is left with a sense of betrayal. It is probably this difference that George Bluestone, the critic, had in mind when he admitted that "the history of the fitful relationship between novel and film: overtly compatible, secretly hostile."¹³ In discussing the various problems of adaptation, another critic, Joy Gould Boyum¹⁴ stresses on the notion of 'fidelity'. "I've already suggested that a film might be faithful to its source," she argues, "to the extent that its implicit reading remained within the confines of that work's interpretative possibilities, to the extent that it neither violated nor diminished them." In the case of *The English Patient*, in spite of the director's most sincere efforts of authentic adaptation, we are left with a negative reaction from the audience who feel that the 'cinematic' quality of Ondaatje's novel is lost. Though Ondaatje — who served as the filmmaker's unofficial muse during the shoot in Italy and Tunisia — is clearly pleased with the alchemy that has transformed his elliptical novel into a romantic epic, he justified all of the directorial changes which seemed to have an extraordinary subtlety - "Almost all of them seemed to be there for an intelligent purpose, as opposed to "Hey, let's have more sex!" or something like that" he confided to Gary Kamiya¹⁵.

In the post-modern politics of this novel, the novelist moves defiantly to a provocative sense of nation and community. Except for the nurse Hana, there is no Canadian setting in the story at all. In forms closer to Teshome Gabriel's 'travelling aesthetics' (cinema) and what Gilles Deleuze calls 'nomad thought', Ondaatje opens both the community and aesthetics in the novel to all that is de-centered, context sensitive, shifting, provisional and dispersive. Though such a novel seems to be apparently easily adaptable to the audio-visual medium of film, we get the Oscar-laden epic film which will be remembered more for the gorgeous Naveen Andrews who cuts a heroic figure and actually gets together with the delectable Juliette Binoche (something that most men aspire to). One prime reason for deviation from the novel is that the real challenge of adaptation lies elsewhere — not in the misplaced faith in the true-to-life replication of Ondaatje's surface events, but in the inability of the director in finding cinematic equivalents to the tensions that the novelist inscribed into that web of linguistic interrelations which constitute the text. Apart from the non-verbal signifiers—namely, music, iconic images, ambient sounds and other audio-visual manipulations, which according to Joy Gould Boyum's suggestion is also a 'language', it is the literary language which has no cinematic equivalents that

poses the real problem and eludes adaptation. At the simplistic level, Ondaatje is not read in order "to find out what happened next," as E.M. Forster puts it in *Aspects of the Novel*, but for what is written next and how it is worded. Consider the following quotation :

It was as if he had walked under the millimetre of haze just above the inked fibres of map, that pure zone between land and chart, between distances and legend, between nature and storyteller. Sandford called it 'geomorphology'. (246)

This kind of narration certainly is very difficult to replicate in cinematography. Again, there are several passages in the novel which are explicitly concerned with the dream of colonization:

The ends of the earth are never the points on a map that colonists push against, enlarging their sphere of influence. On one side servants and slaves and tides of power and correspondence with the Geographical Society. On the other the first step by a white man across a great river, the first sight (by a white eye) of a mountain that has been there forever. (141)

In passages such as these, the novel is clearly concerned with the places that cannot be adequately represented on the maps of the colonizers, which is why the novel mentions problematic aspects of mapping on a number of occasions. It is as if mapping is an extension of the colonial enterprise to Ondaatje's mind. In this sense, the novel provides an implicit and explicit critique of colonization and its geographical and imperial concerns. Because such issues are not replicated adequately in the cinematic medium, to keep the film to its standard length, the director therefore takes course to 'larding' or 'padding' the text often with audio-visual pleasures exceeding narrative functionality. Thus we are left with a negative from the audience to the director's most sincere efforts of authentic adaptation.

Responses towards the film version of *The English Patient* have varied from total negation to loud applause. One anonymous reader from Toronto made the most interesting online comment: "Gossamer images clog the narrative leaving the reader with an impression of holding a cobweb - one is left reading nothing but air! Like *A Room With A View*, the movie is better than the book and the soundtrack is worth buying as well." (September 23, 1998) Another reviewer from Boston recommended the book very highly but without seeing the movie or planning to see it at all. (October 6, 1998) When Margaria Fichtner asked Ondaatje how he coped with his work which was once an undiluted work of literature and is now both the possession and the product of popular culture, the writer commented: "I'm just sort of coming to terms with that...Even now that I've seen the finished film, there's really the sense that it is part of the book in some odd way, but it's also completely different. It's almost like somebody told me a story, and I tell the story,

and somebody hears that story and takes it somewhere else and tells it in a different language, It's very much that effect." The most interesting response of course comes from the novelist himself. Ondaatje said that screen writer/director Anthony Minghella's commitment to retain the novel's fluidity of time and place did much to alleviate any author anxieties. Still, "this was a book that could only come from me, but now it's just as personal to Anthony, We're all sharing the story in a way now. It's difficult and wonderful."¹⁶ We can conclude with the ardent wish that instead of being frustrated, many more adaptations of popular novels should receive such positive response.

Notes and References :

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ROBERT FROST'S RESPONSE TO EMILY DICKINSON

Suhas Kumar Roy Moulick

A considerable portion of the recent Frost criticism seems to show a preoccupation with the intellectual element in his poetry. This has obviously resulted in a relative neglect of what seems to me to be a significant area of investigation, viz Frost's response to Emily Dickinson - a subject which demands a full-length study. The present essay is an attempt at exploring the nature of the relationship that existed between them. It may not be out of place to mention here that Emily Dickinson is not among those poets who were introduced to Frost by his mother in the boyhood years, nor is she included in the list of Frost's favourite authors as evident in the following letter that records his adolescent interest in poetry :

The first poetry I read for myself and read all to pieces (this was at fourteen) was Poe, the next E.R. Sill, the next Browning (of the Dramatic Lyrics and Romances only), the next Palgrave's Treasury (I did read that literally to rags and tatters. This was in 1892). The next Matthew Arnold, the next T.E. Brown (as late as—not sure of date—but say 1910).....Somewhere in there I had a great time with Emerson.....Oh and there was Keats minus Endymion! I'd like to know what I haven't liked.... I suppose I had the first copy of Francis Thompson's poems in America. Even Dowson! But before all write me as one who cares most for Shakespearean and Wordsworthian sonnets.¹

In this connection one may cite yet another evidence of Frost's earliest literary preferences which hardly suggest his boyhood affection for Dickinson :

He never read (all the way through) a book of any kind to himself before his 14th year. His mother read aloud constantly Poe and Shakespeare. George MacDonald [Macdonald] - old fashioned romances, like The Romance of Dollard. [A list of Frost's early prose reading follows : Romantic novelists and historians like Scott, Fenimore Cooper, Jules Verne, Jane Porter, and W.H. Porter], Read first poetry in 15th year. In that year he read a little of Shelley and Keats in Christmas gift books. Almost learned all of Poe by heart. Keats and Arnold only other poets he ever found he knew as large a proportion of.²

It is rather during the 1890s, more precisely in Frost's senior year at Lawrence High School in the spring of 1892, a period of his intensive study in the company of Elinor White and Carl Burrell, that he became especially impressed by the poetry of Dickinson, as Lawrence Thompson records in his book.³ How deeply fascinated Frost was then by the work of Dickinson may further be attested by the fact that he presented Elinor White with a copy of Dickinson's poems which had recently been published (posthumously) for the first time. It is by reading aloud from Dickinson's poetry, to suggest yet another

evidence of Frost's passion for Dickinson, that he used to begin his class while teaching a seminar on reading and writing poetry at Amherst College in 1917.⁴ It is equally important to recall here that although Dickinson remained of interest throughout his life, her influence on Frost's literary career is perhaps most eloquently manifested in the poems of his early youth when his formidable New England forebear had a formative role to play in the development of his muse, and the qualities that drew him to her are chiefly the terse, homely, gnomic, cryptic and witty suggestiveness of her verse.⁵

Quite significantly, compared with Frost's response to Emerson and Thoreau, which is generous and simple, his attitude to Dickinson is somewhat complex and less enthusiastic. As a matter of fact, one notices a discordant note in his recognition of her excellence since his admiration for her poetry was not consistently unqualified. Although he derived much inspiration and driving force from Dickinson for a number of poems composed in his early twenties and often referred to her works both in private and public as instances of the type of poetry he most liked, he was not uncritical of her lack of concern for metre and rhyme. A sensitive reader and a champion of perfect rhyme as he was,⁶ he could hardly approve of Dickinson's divergence from convention to which she had so often committed herself. The fact is well corroborated by Frost's criticism of the way ideas and images in her poetry are given precedence over rhyme which is left to fend for itself. To his mind this was Dickinson's chief weakness as a poet and this eventually led her to compromise her art. "She was more interested", objected Frost, "in getting the poem down and writing a new one. I feel that she left some to be revised later, and she never revised them..... She has all kinds of off-rhymes. Some that do not rhyme. Her meter does not always go together..... The meter and rhyme often had to take care of itself".⁷

Though Frost stands apart from Dickinson with respect to the importance of metre and rhyme in poetry, he resembles her in poetic method inasmuch as he, like his predecessor, prefers to proceed rather obliquely — through hints, parables, questions, metaphors, indirections and symbols. They seem to be on convergent lines also in relation to their views on poetry. Frost's definition of poetry in terms of 'honest duplicity'⁸ — 'a metaphor, saying one thing and meaning another, saying one thing in terms of another, the pleasure of ulteriority'⁹ — puts one in mind of Dickinson's words: 'Tell all the truth but tell it slant/Success in Circuit lies'.¹⁰ One may further hear echoes of Dickinson's injunction in yet another remark of Frost: 'You don't want to say directly when you can say indirectly'. It is apt to note that homely experiences which all recognize, but few record, were, to both Dickinson and Frost, text and occasion for profound generalizations and multiple levels of meaning. In other words, what poetry meant to them was a sort of adult entertainment.

Most Dickinson critics seem to be less eloquent on the ways Frost's admiring appreciation of her poetry affected his attitudes and moulded his poetry when he first sought to put it before his readers in the 1890s. More importantly, what Frost came to discern in the poetry of his forebear is a kindred New England voice. Although Frost exhibits in his poetry little of the wistfulness for death—an obsessive theme with Dickinson — one notices that a kind of thematic kinship binds a number of their poems together and these poems were all published in the 1890s. Of no less significance is the fact that when, in the spring of 1892, Frost studied Dickinson's first poems in print, he was particularly fascinated by Dickinson's rare gift for creating a range of moods in her various imaginative encounters with death, and 'the poems which cut deepest for him were those which expressed her doubt whether any reasons fashioned by the mind concerning life in heaven could compensate for the heart's passionate and instinctive regrets over the transience of earthly bliss.'¹¹ The point may well be explicated by referring to the following Dickinson poem published in *Poems* (1890):

I reason, earth is short
 And anguish absolute,
 And many hurt;
 But what of that?
 I reason, we could die:
 The best vitality
 Cannot excel decay;
 But what of that?
 I reason that in heaven
 Somehow, it will be even,
 Some new equation given,
 But what of that?

What impressed and inspired Frost was not only the terse, homely and cryptic nature of Dickinson's verses, but her treatment of the theme of death and its consequent discomforts also, and this is much in evidence in his 'The Birds Do Thus', a sentimental love poem published in the *Independent*, 1896:

I slept all day
 The birds do thus
 That sing a while
 At eve for us.
 To have you soon
 I gave away —

Well satisfied
 To give — a day.
 Life's not so short
 I care to keep
 The unhappy days!
 I choose to sleep.

A close reading of the two poems reveals that Frost's poem, despite certain dissimilarities and contrasts in its tone, is perhaps a reply to Dickinson's. Equally striking here is Frost's use of the short line in consonance with Dickinson's practice.

The same correspondences of subject-matter appears in Frost's 'My Butterfly' (1894) and Dickinson's butterfly poems : 'Two Voyagers' and 'The Butterfly's Day' (published in *Poems, Second Series, 1891*). What makes these (three) poems kindred pieces is the underlying elegiac note implicit in their handling of the themes of extinction and the transitory nature of the individual's life-cycle. That Dickinson's poems are Frost's main impulse and motif has been documented by Lawrance Thompson. Frost's poem, as Thompson notes, was inspired "by a moment which had occurred late in the fall of his few months at Dartmouth, a moment when he had found a fragile butterfly wing, lying among dead leaves". Frost, however, could not produce instant poetry out of it, and 'because the delicate wing seemed to him so perfect an image, representing the brevity of life, he had been trying to build an elegy around it ever since he had left Dartmouth college.'¹² It was his close acquaintance with Dickinson's twin poems that eventually helped him to articulate his feelings into a poem.

'Revelation' stands out as yet another example where Frost seeks to modify Dickinsonian suggestions. In its tone, spirit and suggestiveness the poem is reminiscent of the following verses of Dickinson (published in 1891) where she speaks of God's somewhat playful and capricious reluctance to show Himself to man :

I know that he exists
 Somewhere, in silence
 He has hid his rare life
 From our gross eyes.
 'T is an instant play,
 'T is a fond ambush,

Just to make bliss
Earn her own surprise!

But should the play
Prove piercing earnest,
Should the glee glaze
In death's stiff stare.

Would not the fun
Look too expensive?
Would not the jest
Have crawled too far? (241)

Significantly, in 'Revelation', which seems to be an answer to Dickinson's lines, Frost replaces gods (in Dickinson's poem) by 'babes': He uses the idea of children playing at hide-and-seek with a God, whose earthly presence is at best veiled, as a means of describing the process of poetic revelation. To put it differently, it is the poetic problem of revelation, to which the reader's attention is subtly drawn. Like Dickinson, Frost appears to be aware of the exemplary importance of God's veiled presence for the poet. The point may be further elucidated by referring to the following observations: 'The hide-and-seek metaphor in 'Revelation' becomes much richer in extension if it is considered in relation to the poet's problem..... The creator of poems is quite as much interested in the problem of communication as God himself.'¹³ Here, as in many other poems, we find Frost musing on his art in his usual cryptic mode, keeping the focus elsewhere. Is not the poem an illustration of Frost's belief in Dickinson's dictum: "Tell all the truth but tell it slant"?

Echoes of Dickinson's ideas and images are also heard in two other Frost poems, namely, 'Blue-Butterfly Day' and 'In White'. A distinctly Dickinsonian attitude informs the theme of 'Blue-Butterfly Day.' It describes the fragile and ephemeral course of life of the butterfly as suggested in its snowflake-like act of flurrying down; 'In White', an original version of 'Design', celebrates with a Dickinsonian emphasis on colour, the tragic aftermath to the white moth's fateful ride of desire. The poem, with its intellectual tautness, philosophical suggestions, images of horrifying whiteness and the appalling sight of a group of characters acting out a ritual dance of death has its antecedent in Dickinson's 'flippant fly upon the pane; A spider at his trade again' (279). It is worth reminding ourselves that in tone and character 'In White' bears close resemblance to Dickinson's 'Cobwebs', particularly to the poet's identification of the spider as an artist: 'The spider as an artist/Has never been employed' (512) and also to the following verse from Dickinson's 'The Spider':

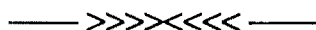
A spider sewed at night
 Without a light
 Upon an arc of white.
 If ruff it was of dame
 Or shroud of gnome,
 Himself, himself inform. (305)

The nature and extent of Frost's dependence on Dickinson for his intellectual sustenance during his first decade as a poet may be traced to yet another poem: "The Quest of the Purple-Fringed" (first published as "The Quest of the Orchis" in the *Independent*. 1901). The context and ideas of Frost's poem tellingly presents the quest and discovery of the elusive flower; it also recalls Dickinson's twin poems on the gentian¹⁴ (the flower Frost mistook for the orchis). It is noteworthy that many of the earlier New England poets have also composed verses on this uncertain and 'far-sought' flower. It is, therefore, no wonder that Frost's acquaintance with them has considerably enriched the scope of his poem and contributed to its charm and appeal. The limited nature of the present enquiry hardly allows any scope to analyse and explore how exactly Frost was influenced in this poem by his reading of the poetry of New England poets of the previous century. It may yet be said that it was from his instinctive appreciation of Dickinson's verses that he might have drawn his first inspirations for the context and theme of his own poem.

Examples of Frost's poems written in the Dickinsonian vein may easily be multiplied. One may even cite "Pod of the Milkweed", a late composition which happens to be the poet's 1954 Christmas poem and is built on Dickinson's view of the butterfly's ephemeral day as a flight of ecstasy. Numerous other instances of Dickinsonian reminiscences and parallels in Frost's poetry tend to suggest that he had almost a life-long affection for Dickinson's poems and the kinship between them was much closer than has usually been perceived. In fact, he was so deeply moved by the intensity, insight and ardour of her poetry that he came to discover something subtle, welcome and satisfying which inevitably took the place of rhyme in her poetry. Even though he complainingly referred to her cavalier attitude to metre and rhyme he was not without admiration for her when he acknowledged that in her poetry rhyme always gave way to truth. Evidently, she was one of those poets who fulfilled Emerson's dicta that all men live by truth and stand in need of expression.¹⁵ Frost responded to Dickinson's remarkable ability to reflect this in her poems.¹⁶ It may not be inappropriate to conclude this study with the words of Frost which record his glowing tribute to Dickinson's excellence and uniqueness: "She is the best of all the women poets who ever wrote, from Sappho on down. As for the other women poets — Mrs. Browning and the rest — they can't touch Emily. Really, Mrs. Browning wasn't much — greatly overrated. Emily wrote fine lines — right from the soul."¹⁷

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5. Lawrance Thompson, *Ibid*, p.105.
6. Philip L. Gerber, *Robert Frost*, Twayne Publishers, Inc, New York, 1966, p. 105.
7. Daniel Smythe, *Robert Frost Speaks*, New York : Twayne, 1964, p. 140.
8. Reginald L. Cook, *The Dimensions Of Robert Frost*, New York, Rinehart & Company, Inc., 1958, p. 63
9. Robert Frost, 'The Constant Symbol', *Atlantic Monthly*, CLXXVIII, October, 1946, p. 50.
10. Emily Dickinson (ca. 1868), published by Millicent Todd Bingham in *Bolts of Melody* in 1945.
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12. *Ibid*, p.162.
13. Lawrance Thomson, *Fire and Ice : The Art and Thought of Robert Frost*, New York, Russell & Russell, 1970, pp. 130-31.
14. (i) 'The gentian weaves her fringes' (328-29)
(ii) 'Fringed Gentian' :
'God made a little gentian' (330)
15. Lawrance Thomson, *Fire and Ice, The Art and Thought of Robert Frost*, New York, Russell & Russell, 1970, p. 7.
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THE SOUTHERN SOCIETY IN THE PLAYS OF TENNESSEE WILLIAMS

Swati Mukerji

Among the post-World War II dramatists, Tennessee Williams holds a distinguished position. He has often been referred to as a social playwright, as a good deal of social experience was expressed through his plays. The authentic social experience that came through was that of general restlessness, disorganisation and frustration. Some of the social themes of the age which were reflected in his works were a concern with isolation, identity and alienation. Hence his plays expressed the deeper consciousness of the society in which they were generated and became a guide to American social life. He instinctively felt that American spiritual and cultural values were at stake and exposed them to the world at large. His best work features the lack of communication between people. This was the major cause of the intense emptiness in the hearts of many Americans. In fact, Williams found his most valid subject matter in the relation of an individual to a particular social milieu, and utilised it repeatedly in the entire canon of his plays. His plays can thus be considered as excerpts from American social life.

One of Tennessee Williams's favourite themes was discussing the difference between the specifically Southern and the general American ways of life. There existed in the past and there continues to exist today, a distinct entity within American culture known as the South. Writers and readers who have been a part of this identity habitually view their experience in terms of this cultural experience. For these writers, including Tennessee Williams, the South signifies something similar to a pastoral dream, far removed from the social reality of the Northern cities. Like his contemporaries Paul Green and Lillian Hellman, Williams recognized in the culture of the South the security, stability and sense of honour which were lacking in the American national character.

In the aftermath of the Civil War, the South was portrayed in the image of a tragically doomed civilisation. As a consequence, the moving force behind Southern literature was sentimentality, rather than reality. The cultural ethos of the South was based on this romantic vision. All Southerners shared certain aesthetic and cultural values which gave them a special social identity. Even the natural and social setting which provided the raw material for these writers was distinctly Southern. These settings were part of a society that never totally abandoned its historical roots. The values esteemed by the Southerners were displayed in their activities, habits and customs of daily life. These they tried to defend from the threat of destruction posed by the forces of modernity.

Tennessee Williams has done more than any other dramatist to make the world aware of the American South. Most of his plays of the major period have Southern settings. He explains his compulsion to write about the South in the following words :

I write out of love for the South. But I can't expect Southerners to realise that my writing about them is an expression of love. It is out of a regret for a South that no longer exists that I write of the forces which have destroyed it.¹

He tried to adhere to the myth of Southern uniqueness in his plays. In this context, the statement of William R. Taylor in his book *Cavalier and Yankee : The Old South and American National Character* is specially appropriate :

Southerners carried on a peculiar kind of dialog with the nation, sometimes constructive and harmonious, sometimes carping and critical. Through it all, they persisted in seeing themselves as different and, increasingly, they tended to reshape this acknowledged difference into a claim of superiority.²

The delineation of Southern gentlewomen like Laura and Amanda Wingfield in *The Glass Menagerie* brought recognition for Williams. Amanda seems to be a representative of the Victorian culture that was prevalent in the South. It demanded that a gentlewoman had to be charming and refined, but never a breadwinner. Existing in a world of dreams and memories, Amanda finds herself unable to cope with a competitive environment. At times she assumes the role of the aggressive, domineering mother figure, who drives her son away from home. At other times, she is the graceful matron, whose sitting on a fire escape is compared to a Southern belle 'settling into a swing on a Mississippi veranda'³.

Amanda's condition is pathetic because she fails to realise that she has outlived the Southern tradition which had accorded special status to women. She is oblivious of the fact that personal charm is no longer considered the prime asset of a woman in modern society. Her daughter Laura, delicate and unconventional, also cannot adjust to contemporary society. She is restrained by the ideals of Puritan culture imposed upon her by her mother. Amanda represents the ideals of the Old South, looking back with longing to a lost culture and 'clinging frantically to another time and place.'⁴

Southern Puritanism of the early twentieth century is reflected in the conflict between the body and the spirit. This is symbolized in the attitudes of Tom Wingfield and his mother Amanda. Even though Amanda's dreams are about her gentlemen callers, she is hysterical about sex due to her training in Puritan renunciation. That is why she asks Tom to find a non-drinking, clean-living suitor for Laura. Contrary to her attitude, Tom believes that a real man of the world is basically a fighter, hunter and lover. It is mainly due to her Puritan background that Amanda is unable to accept this viewpoint even,

when it is explained to her by Tom. She did not realize that she had outlived the Southern tradition, so it was useless to live according to the conventions of that type of society.

Yet Amanda is not entirely blind to the situation. She has had bitter experience as to what can happen to a Southern lady without a shelter of her own. Her cry originates from experience:

I know so well what becomes of unmarried women who aren't prepared to occupy a position. I've seen such pitiful cases in the South—barely tolerated spinsters living upon the grudging patronage of sister's husband or brother's wife... little birdlike women, without any nest - eating the crust of humility all their life!⁵

The Glass Menagerie brought fame to Williams, no doubt, yet his most powerful play till date is definitely *A Streetcar Named Desire*. It deals with his recurrent subject of the contrast between the culture of the old South and that of the New South. The play also highlights the need to find an integration of these two contrasting ways of life. The heroine of this play, Blanche Dubois, is a young woman bred on a rich southern plantation that had gone to seed. Even though she is regarded as the representative of a faded aristocracy, yet she had once held a position of refined Southern respectability. Now reduced to dire financial straits, she has no other option but to come and live with her sister and brother-in-law, in a disreputable locality of New Orleans, ironically named Elysian Fields.

The critic, Joseph Wood Krutch believed that the age put Blanche in a dilemma:

She looks about for a tradition according to which she may live and a civilization to which she can be loyal ...

Behind her lies a past which in retrospect, seems to have been civilized. She has good reason to know that the culture of the Old South is dead. But it is the only culture she knows anything about; so she tries to choose the dead past and becomes the victim of an impossible choice.⁶

Blanche was a displaced Southerner who felt alienated from urban society which was a product of the Northern cities. For many others like her, the Civil War brought not only destruction of property, but also the death of loved ones and untold suffering. She records her descent into agony in the following words :

I took the blows in my face and my body! All those deaths! The long parade to the graveyard ...

How in hell do you think all that sickness and dying was paid for? Death is expensive.⁷

Blanche knew that as far as the old way of life was concerned, she could never go back. She had somehow stepped onto an unfamiliar terrain of rapid change. She has been sketched by Williams as a helpless survivor from the past, making pathetic efforts to cling to a bygone society. She is as if stranded in a no-man's land as she cannot lead the life of her sister, nor can she go back to the genteel life of her past. She is made to realize that the culture of the Old South is dead, yet unfortunately it is the only culture she can fit into and to which she can be loyal. That is why she chooses defeat, rather than compromise and adjustment to an alien culture. Through her plight, Williams shows that the existence of a decayed Southern aristocracy was one of the inescapable truths of his society. Blanche preserves the veneer of an aristocratic belle of the Old South and tries to impress Mitch by her refinement: 'I can't stand a naked light bulb, any more than I can stand a rude remark or a vulgar action'.⁸ She is obsessed with her role of a proper Southern lady, hardly realizing that in that way her madness lies. We see how in the final scene, she becomes victim of her own fantasy.

It is through Blanche's dialogue that readers recognize her manor-born superiority. She identifies the lines on Mitch's cigarette case as belonging to a sonnet by Mrs. Browning. She is evidently familiar with American literature, since she mentions Whitman, Poe and Hawthorne. Along with these literary references, her vocabulary also contains many poeticisms. As she confesses to Mitch, she had viewed him as 'a cleft in the rock of the world that I could hide in'.⁹

This sort of dialogue is in stark contrast to that of her brother-in-law, Stanley Kowalski. He is an inhabitant of one of the New Orleans slums and speaks accordingly. The harshness of his speech contrasts with the lilting quality in hers. Yet, she cannot sustain her pose for long, for Stanley scoffs at it and gives her a bus-ticket back to Laurel.

Throughout the play, Blanche constantly tries to find protection through another person, as the Southern tradition demands. The director of the play Elia Kazan clarified in his notebook about *Streetcar* :

Blanche is a social type, an emblem of a dying civilization, making its last curlicued and romantic exit ... her behaviour is social... Likewise, Stanley's behaviour is social too. It is the basic animal cynicism of today ... The thing about the tradition in the 19th century was that it worked then. It made a woman feel important, with her own secure positions and functions, her own special worth. It also made a woman at that time,

one with her society. But today it does not work ... it makes Blanche feel alone, outside of her society.¹⁰

The historian George Tindall, in his well-known work *The Emergence of the New South*, felt that the response of this 'comparatively static society was a mixture of hope and fear, of anticipation and nostalgia'.¹¹ The literature of the early decades of the twentieth century derived strength from the way it interpreted the life of the Southern community. Writers who drew inspiration from the life of their native region, interpreted the adjective 'Southern' to mean something more than a geographical distinction. It signified an altogether different way of life, a kind of refinement that remains unappreciated in the modern world. Yet, for those writers who owe no loyalty to the South, this kind of life is a conformity to futile values without any positive consequence.

One notable fact is that Williams has never dealt with the intriguing question of racial relationship in his plays. This is because he is usually considered a socially committed writer and this was one issue of which all Southerners were keenly aware. Instead of focussing on the plight of the blacks in the South, Williams tries to explore the consequences which arose from living according to the Puritan code. The repressiveness of Southern Calvinism engendered a sense of rebellion in the young playwright, which he sometimes transferred to his characters.

This factor is evident to some extent in *Summer and Smoke* (1948), another play set totally in the South, and with a cast of Southern characters. In this play, Williams makes a study of a frustrated woman living in Glorious Hill, Mississippi. Alma Winemiller is an affected, unmarried, puritanical Southerner. In spite of her affectations, she has an elegance of speech and mannerism, which is a natural trait in most Southern women. For Williams, 'she seems to belong to a more stately age, such as the Eighteenth Century in France'.¹² She is attracted to John Buchanan, an unpuritanical young doctor, who feels stifled in a stagnant society. He has the fresh and shining look of an epic hero. His father exemplifies the refinement associated with the Southern tradition, and he has a fatherly affection for Alma who is a faithful adherent to Southern Puritanism. The rigid Puritanical codes of Southern society have made her hysterical about the physical aspect of a relationship. In spite of that she feels a frustrated love for John Buchanan who is not restricted by Southern mannerisms.

However, Alma's cool, detached and indifferent exterior fails to deceive John who recognizes her indifference as a camouflage for concealed passion and articulates it thus :

You couldn't name it and I couldn't recognize it. I thought it was just a Puritanical ice that glittered like flame. But now I believe that it was

flame, mistaken for ice ... your eyes and your voice are the two most beautiful things I've ever known — and also the warmest.¹³

We finally see how Alma rejects the codes of purity which society had imposed upon her from an early state. She seems to have changed her attitude and mental set-up after hearing John's anatomy lecture - she shrugs off her Puritanism and expresses it to John thus :

You talk as if my body had ceased to exist for you John, in spite of the fact that you've just counted my pulse ... You've come round to my old way of thinking, and I to yours ... I came here to tell you that being a gentleman doesn't seem so important any more, but you're telling me, I've got to remain a lady.¹⁴

Alma's amazing transformation is the playwright's way of expressing his own mind regarding puritanical social attitudes. Alma and John are symbols of the spirit and of the flesh respectively. The interrelationship of the two characters is symbolic of the inner conflict between the soul and the body. The metaphorical exchange of position between them occurs towards the end of the play. John becomes the representative of Puritanism, whereas Alma becomes advocate of the physical aspect of life. Williams probably intends to point out that in spite of the rigid Puritanical codes of Southern society which Alma had been made to follow all her life, the flesh was stronger than the spirit.

Along with Puritanism, Christianity is also a constant target of the playwright's contempt. For instance, Alma's prudishness originates from the fact that she is the daughter of an Episcopalian minister. Her characteristic is the direct product of Southern Puritanism. It is the opposite of a fully realized sexual experience which John initially seeks from the Mexican, Rosa Gonzales. For Tennessee Williams, the recurring conflict between the flesh and the spirit symbolizes the chasm between the Cavalier and Puritan strains which he found in Southern society and made evident in the characters of his various plays.

Regarding the play, the critic John Mason Brown commented in the *Saturday Review of Literature* :

There is a certain similarity in some of these early Williams plays - a sameness of mood, the identical sense of Southern nostalgia ... It fails because it does not really explain the complications of the natures of Alma and John.¹⁵

The playwright himself has made an interesting comment not only on the play, but also on the characters of Alma and John :

... the play was a tough nut to crack. Miss Alma Winemiller may very well be the best female portrait I have drawn in a play. She simply seemed to exist somewhere in my being and it was no effort to put her on paper.

However the boy she was in love with all her youth, Johnny Buchanan never seemed real to me but always a cardboard figure and I knew it and it distressed me...¹⁶

He found it easy to identify with Alma because he too, experienced a similar conflict between the Cavalier and the Puritan strains in his blood. This was the major cause of the feeling of guilt which he was never able to shed during his entire lifetime.

Another play in which the theme of a frustrated young woman recurs is *Battle of Angels* (1940), a story of decadence set in a Southern locale. The play, later revised and renamed *Orpheus Descending*, presents the affair between a sexually frustrated woman and a Lawrentian hero, who can be regarded as the archetype of the artist. This handsome vagrant wanders into the general store of a bigoted Mississippi town which provides the background for this play. It is interesting to note that a couple of years after *Orpheus Descending* opened on Broadway, the screen version appeared with yet another new title, *The Fugitive Kind*.

Valentine Xavier represents the outsider or the fugitive kind who, by virtue of his artistic inclinations, becomes the victim of an uncongenial society, even though he does not have any roots in it or any responsibility to it. He seems to express the playwright's own belief that it is possible for a man to realize himself only when unencumbered. So his self-realization is a possibility only because he is not a product of claustrophobic Southern Puritanism. He is a wild-spirited boy who stirred up commotion in the gloomy Memphis society which is comparable to a modern hell. Southern society in this play is characterized by ugliness, censorship and repression from which Val, the Romantic ideal, makes his escape. He represents the figure of the wanderer, who like the faded belle, was characteristic of a degenerate society. Just as artists are always misunderstood and their outcries are destined to be muffled, similarly even Val has to submit to violent punishment at the hands of an angry mob because of his random defence of a Negro.

Val, being the outsider, has to associate with certain members of this small Delta community, even though most of them are gossip-hungry housewives. Among the distinctive members of this community is the sex-starved, heavy-drinking Southern aristocrat, Cassandra Whiteside. It is unfortunate that she is a relic of the bygone culture but has lost all the grace and refinement that the culture represented. The burning emotion of Cassandra is starkly contrasted with the figure of Vee Talbot - the barren and frustrated wife of a brutal, racist sheriff. She is on the verge of insanity, and Williams portrays her as a symbol of the consequence of Puritan repression.

Val's relationship with Sandra (short for Cassandra) is not smooth because it is heavy with tension brought about by the clash between her provocation and his antagonism. By her own confession, she represents that generation of women who have a secret

communication with the birds, implying that she belongs to the category of the sensual Cavaliers rather than with the Puritans. In a highly rhetorical speech, Sandra voices one of the playwright's own beliefs, that the free spirit is restricted in the contemporary world. She postulates that both the primitive and the aristocrat are outcasts in a civilized world. In a passionate outburst, she tells Val :

You must be blind! You - savage! And me - aristocrat! Both of us, things whose licence has been revoked in the civilized world. Both of us equally damned and for the same good reason. Because we both want freedom.¹⁷

The critic Ward Morehouse said that this play was :

... another of his (Williams') studies of the sordid aspects of the Deep South ... an interesting but hollow drama.¹⁸

It was because of adverse criticism that the playwright was asked to rewrite the play, which he did, renaming it *Orpheus Descending*. In both the versions Williams had sharply focussed on the moral decadence and malice which characterized this small Southern community. In such an environment, there is a dimension of decay seen in the tyranny of time. It is responsible for muffling the outcries of the rebels who belong to the fugitive kind.

The social image which played a major role in Southern fiction was that of the tradition of the landed gentry. It represents the positive element in Southern history. The plantation theme and the agrarian tradition has been exemplified in bestsellers like Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind*. The same theme recurs in the famous Williamsian play *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. In this play the dramatist again drew his characters and setting from the Deep South. The reason for this choice was probably his knowledge and understanding of the mood and personality of the Southerners, as well as his confidence in being better able to express it. Moreover, the Mississippi Delta area where he grew up held a special appeal for him all his life.

Even though this play is set in the South, it proves that the playwright's talent was not limited to the portrayal of psychopathic Southern belles alone. The story revolves round the home of a rich Mississippi Delta family. In spite of apparent affluence, the Pollitt family is beset with internal hostility, especially between the brothers Brick and Gooper. The plantation becomes the bone of contention between the two brothers. Through this familial conflict, Williams explores the subject of a possible break-up of the agrarian families of the American South. History bears evidence that many such Southern families did gradually break up in the absence of a strong binding force. The plot of this play gives Williams an opportunity to explore the possible break up of a Southern agrarian family.

In this play, the elder son Brick Pollitt is asked to take over the plantation to prevent it from going into other hands. In spite of his immersion in booze, he is made to realize that he can no longer avoid the responsibility of a Southern plantation owner and has to act responsibly in order to safeguard his property. Thus, saving the plantation and consequently the family becomes one of the major themes of *Cat On a Hot Tin Roof*.

This sort of family provided the unifying theme in the works of most Southern writers. Even the Southern Civil War novels have as their central theme the decay or collapse of the family caused by public and private forces. The writers believed that the fate of such families was directly related to the decline of the Southern society since the Civil War. For instance Caroline Gordon in her novel *None Shall Look Back* shows how the break up of a traditional agrarian society leads to the dissolution of the family, to be replaced by a commercial order. Even William Faulkner in his works like *The Unvanquished* and *Absalom Absalom* showed how the war had been a powerful catalyst in the decline of the Southern aristocratic families.

Another play which uses the South for its site and for its characters is *Sweet Bird of Youth*. It is set in a small Southern town called St. Cloud on the Gulf of Mexico. Chance Wayne is a native of this place; he left St. Cloud in search of fame, but had to return empty-handed. He has been portrayed as a weakling, unable to cope with the harsh realities of everyday life. This was probably one way of expressing the recurrent theme that the products of decadent Southern societies become misfits and failures in the modern world. It is also interesting to note that just as the Southern societies degenerated due to various unavoidable causes, so Chance too, has to accept his failure without being able to alter his destiny. He experiences an emotional death and has nothing to look forward to except a bleak future.

In *The Rose Tattoo*, Williams again uses the Southern locale as well as characters. For once, Williams does not focus on the decadence which is inseparable from Southern society as well as the characters. The heroine, Serafina della Rose is also a Southern woman, but does not fall into the category of a faded belle like Blanche (*Streetcar*) or a frustrated matron like Amanda (*Glass Menagerie*). She belongs to the Cavalier tradition and does not exhibit any Puritan repressive tendencies which characterize most Southern characters. Unlike Blanche, she did not belong to the Southern aristocracy or landed gentry and so had no pretensions about being a refined Southern lady. The play is set in a small village on the Gulf Coast - hence both the site and the characters give the play a touch of verisimilitude.

The plays of Tennessee Williams are inseparable from Southern sentiment, probably because he had an instinctive understanding of the South. He could vividly portray all types of Southern characters, especially the misunderstood and the lonely individuals who had been mentally handicapped due to their upbringing in a Puritanical culture.

They were not types, but were unique in their own ways, yet had one thing in common. Their alienation from others made them misfits in a modern materialistic society. It is probably because the playwright identified with them to some extent that he describes them with sympathy and honesty. Yet it must be kept in mind that these vividly portrayed men and women do not belong to the South alone - they have a universality that makes them a part of all people everywhere.

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WHEN SILENCE BEGINS TO SPEAK

Suchandana Guha

'Because women are expected to keep silent about
their close escapes I will not keep silent
and if I am destroyed (naked tree!) someone will
please
mark the spot
where I fall and know I could not live
silent ...'¹

— "On Stripping Bark From Myself".

Alice Walker's inability to remain silent has been the driving force behind all her achievements. Her early career as an activist has enabled her to witness Black suppression within a White patriarchy from very close quarters. Within the Black community, however, it is the Black women Walker is most curious about. That she is committed to explore the oppressions, the endurance and the triumphs of these women is evident from her words :

'To me the Black women are the most fascinating, the most beautiful creations in the world, who persist in their beauty in spite of everything. How they manage this is a mystery and it lures me into their lives'.²

The dying words of Shakespeare's Hamlet were : '*The Rest is Silence*'. A slight deviation from the meaning of these words, would aptly define the situation of the down-trodden Black women. Theirs is a fight both against racial oppression and gender domination. Hence being far from the mainstream, these women and their lives can be labelled as 'The Rest'. They are 'The Rest' who have been doomed to 'Silence'.

Walker resolved to give these silent Black women a voice, these invisible beings, a visible countenance. Her efforts to make Black women be heard and seen perhaps find the widest range of expression through her novels. Five in all, they revolve around the themes of suffering, endurance and survival, connected together with the knot of pain and hope. Walker's mission to give utterance to that which is mute is most forcefully presented through her latest novel *Possessing The Secret of Joy* (1992).

In this novel, at every step we encounter a silence, and are finally made aware of what the results can be when silence begins to speak. In *Possessing The Secret of Joy*, Walker intended to talk about that which an andro-centric society considered a taboo. She steps

upon forbidden ground to explore the realm of complete silence to disclose the traditional practice of genital mutilation upon African women. Walker's spokesperson is Tashi, a tribal African woman, whom we had been introduced to in her former novels *The Color Purple* (1982) and *The Temple of My Familiar* (1989).

Possessing The Secret of Joy charts the course of Tashi's life. The novel's ironic beginning sets forth a parallel between the role of a woman in the Black community and that of a she-panther within the panther society. The beautiful young panther named Lara is a projection of Tashi's inner self. From Tashi's subconscious, we move on to the conscious present where we find her in the arms of Adam, the love of her life.

There was happiness, a sense of contentment in their initial lovemaking, though they came from remarkably different backgrounds. While Tashi was a native African, a young Black girl who had not undergone the traditional practice of circumcision because of her conversion to Christianity, Adam was the son of an African-American missionary devoid of any puritan sentiment. Marriage seemed the only answer that could unite these two complementary souls yearning for togetherness. But just when they had reached the peak of contentment in their relationship, Tashi wavers.

Tashi fears that if she goes to America as Adam's wife, she would stand the danger of losing herself, her identity as a Black African woman. Shouldn't she be true to her race? Shouldn't she carry along with her, her African heritage? Shouldn't she attempt to retain her native culture as much as she can? She must brand herself as a complete African woman or in other words, she should be circumcised.

Despite Adam's sister and her friend, Olivia's remonstrances, Tashi sets out towards the Mbele camp to become a 'true African Woman' with Olivia's pleadings ringing in her ears. I quote :

Tell me to do anything and I will do it

Tell me to go anywhere and I will go

Only don't do this to yourself please

Tashi.¹³

Her misguided loyalty to the customs of her people, leads Tashi to voluntarily submit her body to the inhuman torture of the circumciser, the Tsunga's knife to be genitally mutilated. Tashi is the representative Black woman whose body serves as the stage upon which the macabre ritual of circumcision is performed.

Records prove that the tortuous act of female genital mutilation is performed upon a hundred thousand women and young girls annually. It is practised as a rite of pubescence in many parts of West Africa, the Middle East and Asia as well as in those communities

located within Great Britain, Holland and the United States. About ninety to one hundred million women and girls living today in these countries have been genitally mutilated. Despite its prevalence, the practice was shrouded in silence until Alice Walker together with Pratibha Parmar produced the film *Warrior Marks : Female Genital Mutilation and the Sexual Blinding of Women*,⁴ a powerful documentary that has made this brutal procedure a subject of heated international debate.

According to the statistics gathered by Walker during the making of the film, over thirteen thousand girls are at a risk of circumcision in the United States alone. The procedure involves a ceremonial removal of a woman's genitalia. The mutilation is performed with either a rusty razor blade, a traditional knife or shards of unwashed glass. Sometimes even tin can tops are used.

No wonder in 1982, fourteen children died in Kenya from the effects of clitoridectomy. Though it was officially banned, it is still practised clandestinely in Kenya and quite openly in many other African countries till date.

Recently a newspaper article on female genital mutilation presented reports from Somalia :

Around 98 percent of Somali women as well as most Sudanese girls and some Egyptians, undergo infibulation-the most extreme form of what is now referred to as female genital mutilation (FGM). Millions more in 25 other African countries experience milder forms of clitoridectomy. It is a long held traditional practice but one the World Health Organisation classifies as a 'form of violence against girls and women which has serious physical and psychological consequences'... girls often suffer infections, haemorrhages as a result of the operation ...until recently FGM was something that was almost never discussed in societies which practise it.⁵

These suffering women, these young girls, their fears, hopes, through their trials and tribulations, thoughts and beliefs have been expressed through the figure of Tashi in Walker's novel. Young Tashi's attachment to her elder sister Dura, her inability to understand why Dura suddenly bled to death and why it led her to be terrified at the sight of her own blood, is a recreation of the situation of any helpless, innocent young Black girl.

About Dura's death, which was brought upon by the mutilation she had been unable to bear, a confused Tashi can only say :

"It was a nightmare. Suddenly it was not acceptable to speak of my sister. Or to cry for her".⁶

It was as if Dura had melted into oblivion - had entered the domain of silence.

When it was her turn, Tashi's willing surrender to the process of "initiation into womanhood" brought pain and humiliation in its wake. When Adam came to fetch her from the Mbele camp, where she had voluntarily undergone the inhuman torture, this was what Tashi felt :

He is here, And I can see as he looks at me that he does not know whether to laugh or cry. I feel the same. My eyes see him but they do not register his being. Nothing runs out of my eyes to greet him. It is as if my self is hiding behind an iron door.⁷

The circumcision that she had undergone eats into her consciousness so deeply that Tashi becomes a broken woman. Her physical mutilation also mutilates her spiritually to such an extent that she has to undergo psychotherapy. She is treated by disciples of both Freud and Jung and also by Karl Jung himself.

Renamed as Evelyn in America, she undergoes a fundamental personality change. One cannot measure which was worse, the physical change which she undergoes or the psychological change resulting from her excision which eats into her consciousness. It is painful to see that in the process of branding herself as the typical African woman, she ends up losing her very identity when she goes to live with Adam in North America. The Tashi-Evelyn split hints at the complexity of the problem. The African-American woman, Tashi-Evelyn suffers a split in personality. A sense of insecurity washes over her as she fails to come to terms with herself. Mentally, spiritually she ceases to be an individual. She is torn between her African past and American present. When her doctor asks her :

"And what about your dreams?"

She replies :

"I do not dream. I do not dare tell about the dream I have every night that terrifies me."⁸

It is her husband Adam who tells the doctor :

"She dreams they have imprisoned her and broken her wings".⁹

But Adam does not understand who her captors were. Confused and traumatized, Tashi no longer knows who she is or what her liberation is going to be. Being unable to relate to the world outside, she withdraws behind the closed doors of her mind. She now sits down to think and begins to analyse her experience. Her analyses make her realize what had actually caused Dura's death. Gradually she regains the ability to recognize her own reality. She begins to explore the 'reasons' invented by her ancient ancestors for what was done to her and millions of other women and girls over thousands of years.

It is understood in most countries where female circumcision is practised, that to be marriageable, a girl child must be circumcised. Marriage agreements are regarded as impossible without the girl having undergone the ritual. The role of women in countries where the ritual is performed is clear to make a man a good wife, to be hardworking, to be chaste and to produce children. Their acceptance of the torture mutilation is integrally linked to their chances for survival.¹⁰ These, along with the promise of becoming the complete African woman, true to her tribe, were the grounds upon which this evil practice of genital mutilation was based.

Tashi realizes all this and progresses further to discover the connection between mutilation and enslavement. Genital mutilation, Tashi understands, is just another tool in the hands of the patriarchy to enslave their women and keep them in chains.

What is reprehensible is that not only does Tashi struggle to survive the suffering and humiliation, she is not even allowed to speak of them. Even her husband Adam, sympathetic as he is to Tashi's condition, refuses to discuss the question of her mutilation publicly because he is ashamed to. He accepts that even discussing the issue is taboo. But it is this taboo which Tashi now wants to break. Walker gives her suffering a voice to make it universally known. As her understanding grows, so does her capacity to encounter her overwhelming grief. Beyond this grief lies a growing anger. This anger propels her to act. She realizes that she can break free only by erasing the existence of that woman who had fettered her being.

In this novel, Walker constructs two archetypes - 'the mother who betrays' and the daughter so betrayed'. The daughter' is Tashi and the 'mother' who forbids her the right to her own body is the Tsunga who had circumcised her — M'Lissa.

M'Lissa was a prized midwife and healer among the Olinka tribe whose task was to transform young girls like Tashi into a complete Olinka woman through the ceremony of 'initiation'. It is M'Lissa, the representative of the class of traditional circumciser, who looms as a threat to Tashi's complete liberation. Hence taking away her life is essential for Tashi. To quote her :

"What other than her lying life, did I want from M'Lissa. I worried this question incessantly, as only the insane can. Each night I fingered the razors I kept concealed in the stuffing of my pillow, fantasizing her bloody demise. I swore I would mutilate her wrinkled body so much her own god wouldn't recognize her."¹¹

What makes Tashi wait, was M'Lissa's confession or in other words, her lie, that "her death had been ordained" and that :

"The murder of the Tsunga, the circumciser, by one of those whom she has circumcised ... would elevate her to the position of a saint."¹²

But as the days pass by, Tashi realizes that 'Saint' or 'no Saint', she has to kill M'Lissa. She owes it to Dura, her sister, a victim of M'Lissa's knife. She owes it to the women of her own community and beyond. She needs to resist the power of the Tsunga, to save girls from the knives of Tsungas like M'Lissa, who lie when they claim that they have been doing their duty in service to tradition, to what makes them a people, in service to the country and what makes them who they are. Towards the end of the novel, M'Lissa confesses :

"Who are we but torturers of children."¹³

But all her life she has been labeling this torturers as a necessity.

Tashi's killing of M'Lissa is an act of resistance. She is finally able to come to terms with herself. Tashi's resistance, her struggle to give voice to the unvoiced sinister practice of female excision bestows upon her such strength that sitting in her prison cell, she can utter the words : "Ache Mbele". 'Ache' in Yoruba means 'the power to make things happen while 'Mbele' means 'forward' in KiSwahili. This is the power, the energy to move on forward which Tashi wins through her fight.

Not only does Tashi talk about her own suffering, but she moves forward to inspire all other African women to tear apart the deeper silence which shrouds the practice of their physical, mental and spiritual mutilation. Once they break through, they will be free. Through Tashi then, Walker strikes with powerful force at the most controversial issue of the present times.

Charged with new spirit, Tashi moves forward to attain complete liberation. Her final liberation comes through death which she embraces, having transcended all fear of it. To quote her :

"I was not able to comprehend death except as something that had already happened to me. Dying now does not frighten me."¹⁴

Standing at the threshold of death which actually means a new beginning for her, Tashi discovers that in resistance alone is hidden the secret of joy, the secret of fulfilment of being. Her resistance has been rewarded by the joy, the contentment she experiences deep within her. Satisfied, she dies with a smile on her lips and the dream of a better tomorrow in her eyes.

With Tashi's death, we realize that when silence begins to speak, resistance itself is the speech. When silence begins to speak the flame of protest is kindled high. The cry is so intense that the world has no option but to listen. Though one Tashi dies, thousands of other Tashis carry on the struggle which she has launched. They resolve not to let "their gory childhood be their daughter's lot". Yes, this is what results when silence begins to speak.

Notes and References :

1. Alice Walker, *Her Blue Body Everything We Know : Earthling Poems, 1965-1990 Complete* (San Diego : Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1991).
2. Alice Walker, Interview taken by John O' Brien, *Interviews With Black Writers* (New York : Liveright, 1973).
3. Alice Walker, *Possessing The Secret of Joy* (New York : Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992) 21.
4. <http://www.sistahspace.com/nommo/fgm 29.html> "Warrior Marks : The movie and debate over female circumcision," I; Pratibha Parmar is Indian born, now residing in England. She is a film maker who makes films on women's issues for British Television. Her film *Warrior Marks : Female Genital Muilation and the Sexual Blinding of Women* is a powerful documentary which lays bare the horrors of female excision. Executive producer Alice Walker 1993 . It documents the array of experiences of women in West Africa including Senegal, Mali and Gambia. The film documents and supports the indigenous women's resistance to genital mutilation. International organisations like *Forward International* and the *Commission to Abolish Sexual Mutilation* are working to develop local and international responses to the issue.
5. Simon Denyer, "My gory childhood will not be my daughter's lot". *Telegraph* Calcutta 22 Apr. 2001. 111. In Northern Somalia, some of the women have succeeded in bringing the issue of genital mutilation out in the open as never before. There are still many others who believe this is a religious obligation. But with growing literacy, gradually, they are learning that their excision has nothing to do with the holy *Koran*.
6. Alice Walker, *Possessing The Secret of Joy* (New York : Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992) 15.
7. *Ibid.*, 45
8. *Ibid.*, 25.
9. *Ibid.*, 27.
10. <http://www.sistahspace.com/nommo/fgm 29. html> "Warrior Marks : The movie and the debate over female circumcision."2.
11. Alice Walker, *Possessing The Secret of Joy* (New York : Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992) 203-04.
12. *Ibid.*, 204.
13. *Ibid.*, 219.
14. *Ibid.*, 276.

DEROZIO'S 'NATIVE LAND' : FACT OF FICTION ?

Debapriya Paul

There is a general tendency, to date, among the biographers and critics of H.L.V. Derozio (1809-1831) to glorify him more as one of the earliest Indian patriots than as a poet. It is as if his shortcomings as a poet can easily be mitigated by his "patriotic" ardour. With the arrival of post-colonialism Derozio-worship has taken an altogether new and devious route. Overlooking the paradox of his position as a "patriot", the tendency, now, is to see Derozio as a part of the nation-building process in nineteenth-century India with an obvious emphasis on the element of so-called anti-colonial resistance found in his poetry.

Going against this trend the present essay attempts to re-examine the paradox of Derozio's position as an articulator of 'national consciousness', by linking it with two other discourses which were active during Derozio's lifetime :

- (1) The Eurasian struggle for identity, and
- (2) The Orientalist initiative to recuperate India's lost heritage.

Since it is difficult to establish any direct connection between these discourses and Derozio's patriotic verse, we should proceed with caution, and should not draw hasty conclusions. But, after all, what matters is seeing things in perspective.

(1) Indian or East-Indian ?

The struggle of the East-Indians for a separate legal identity in the nineteenth century and Derozio's involvement in it is a historical reality.¹ In the present essay we will try to examine Derozio's nativist agenda in his poems vis-a-vis his proud East-Indian identity. To do so we will begin with a few articles published in *The Kaleidoscope*, a journal which Derozio edited and published.²

The Kaleidoscope was a monthly journal which started in August 1829 and continued to be published till July 1830. Within this short span the magazine published at least three long articles concerning the East-Indians in India. Though we cannot attribute all of them to Derozio, it is certain that they would not have been published without his editorial consent. So, he cannot avoid the moral responsibility for the comments contained in those articles.

In August 1829, in the very first issue of *The Kaleidoscope* the first instalment of an article titled "East-Indians in the Mofussil. The Laws which affect the East-Indians in the Mofussil" was published. The article debated the legal status of the East-Indians outside Calcutta. The immediate context was the East-Indians' Petition to be presented before the British Parliament in 1830. While the article justified the Petition for a separate legal identity for the East-Indians, it also upheld certain merits of the existing Mahommedan laws to which the East-Indians were subjected. The central question was the status of the subjects of the British government under Company's laws. The article ruled that while the law of the Company declared that all who are born within its dominion are 'natural born subjects', the Sudder Dewany Adwalut favours those who are born of European parents on both sides over the 'hybrid' East-Indians.³ Consequently, the East-Indians in the interior of the country have to suffer because there Company's regulations recognize only two classes of subjects --- 'Hindoos' and 'Mahommedans'.⁴ Such arguments pertaining to the claim of legal immunity are symptomatic of the tendency of the East-Indians to discriminate themselves from the actual 'natives' of India.

Such discriminatory gestures were further informed by the question of racial superiority of the Europeans over the indigenous natives. Caught between these two extremes of racial identity, the East-Indians appeared to be keen on accentuating the European heritage in their blood. The article, "The East-India Company's Charter" (*The Kaleidoscope* No. 3 October 1829), signed by one "E. E.", criticized the Company for its educational policies in these terms :

There is one point, however, on which we [the East-Indians] cannot speak of our honourable masters [the Company] in favourable terms. Their conduct towards that unfortunate class of their subjects, who are recognized under the denomination of East-Indians, has been anything but commendatory; while a most conciliating tone has been observed towards their native subjects..... If half the money, labour, anxiety and trouble, bestowed on behalf of the natives, had been employed on account of the East-Indians, an act so benevolent could not have passed without demanding the sincerest gratitude of a despised and neglected race.⁵

A little later the writer unabashedly remarks : "Were it not for the strenuous exertions which sustain their elevation, their name and descent would soon perish in unmerited obscurity or commingle with the same unbright stream with those of the netherstock, from which they are partly sprung."⁶

If such was the rhetoric of racial antipathy in Derozio's own paper, then, may one politely ask, which 'native land' is Derozio celebrating in his poems like "To India — My

Native Land" ? In the absence of any strong intellectual support, Derozio's brand of nation-worship appears to be idle flirtations with a fashionable ideal : much in the manner of Romantic poets like Thomas Moore.

But sometimes these flirtations are taken rather too seriously, as it is by one recent scholar, Dr. Rosinka Chaudhuri. Writing in the post-colonial vein she proposes to mitigate the injustice and neglect of other post-colonial critics (like Said, Spivak, Bhabha) towards Derozio and the other gentlemen poets in nineteenth-century Bengal. In her discussion of Derozio, to whom she devotes the very first chapter ("A New Race of Men in the East"), she describes him as "a self-conscious representative of the mixed-race community".⁷ But she fails to see any apparent contradiction between Derozio, the East-Indian and Derozio, the much showcased patriot. On the other hand, she finds no difference between Derozio and the other Bengali intellectuals of his time, on the basis of her conclusion that 'Imperial values before the Revolt [of 1857] had not yet formed rigid barriers between races' and there was 'an equality among upperclass members of all communities'.⁸ A mere look at the articles published in *The Kaleidoscope* or *The East-Indian* (another journal edited by Derozio) will establish the existence of strong racial animosity among the three principal races --- the Europeans, the East-Indians and the pure natives (Hindus and Muslims). The Revolt of 1857 only sharpened this inter-racial hatred. The East-Indians sought to prove their loyalty as British subjects; they accused the 'natives' of ingratitude towards the benevolence of the British government and thereby utterly unfit for the money and energy spent on their improvement. The allegation was effectively countered by Hurish Chunder Mookherjea in *Hindoo Patriot* of 9 December, 1858.⁹

So, if we at all take Derozio's patriotism seriously then we have to admit he was a patriot of a different mould and certainly not the precursor of the Indian nationalism of the later years. His patriotism is defined not by resistance but by an indirect affirmation of his loyalty to the East-Indian community and the British government. Perhaps he too shared the dream of the writer of the article, "Colonization of East-Indians" (*The Kaleidoscope*, March, 1830) of an independent India dominated by the East-Indians.¹⁰ And the real threat to this dream came not from the British, but from the indigenous, non-anglicized 'natives'.

Central to Derozio's patriotism is the concept of an India whose glory is long past. Such an idea had its origin and sustenance in the British Orientalist initiatives to recover the 'lost' heritage of India. Working in complicity with the Colonialist ideology, this Orientalism was able to create an equation between the glorious past of India and the Brahmanic Hindu culture. Derozio subscribed to this view and became vehemently anti-Muslim in his expression of solidarity with ancient Hindu India.

(2) The "fall" of India & the "other"

Ernest Renan, the French philosopher and thinker, in his 1882 lecture, "What is a Nation?" defines; "nation" as a "soul or spiritual principle". This spiritual principle is constituted by two things : one is the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories, the other is the present-day consent, the desire to live together, the will to perpetuate the value of the heritage that one has received in an undivided form.¹¹ Going by this idea we can say Derozio's nationalism partially satisfied the first part of Renan's theory; as for the second part, I think we have cast enough doubts about it in our discussion of the East-Indian question.

Derozio certainly persuades himself to be an heir to the hoary past of India. But such nationalism has a problem : and it is the problem of the 'other'. Partha Chatterjee, who regards nationalism to be a derivative of the Enlightenment, argues that nationalism as an ideal fails, for like the Enlightenment, it too needs its "other" to assert its sovereignty as the universal ideal.¹²

Derozio's nationalism, as the universal ideal, is plagued with the question of the "other". For him it is often the Muslim 'other' against whom his ideal is defined. And the roots of this "other" are already present in the orientalist discourse which gave sustenance to Derozio's "nationalism".

One of the earliest British administrator-cum-amateur Orientalists, John Zephaniah Holwell, clearly articulated the future course of the Orientalist project. In his introduction to Part I of his treatise, *Interesting Historical Events, Relative to the Provinces of Bengal, and the Empire of Indostan* (1765-1767) he declared in no uncertain terms : 'Here I would be understood to mean [by the term 'Indian'] the Gentoos [i.e. the Hindus] only, now labouring under Mahometan tyranny, but fated, I hope, soon to feel the blessings of a mild British government.'¹³

Holwell was a shrewd administrator who gave circulation to the story of Siraj-ud-Daulah's Black Hole massacre in Calcutta in 1756. His comment articulates the very course of the administrative policy followed by the East India Company after the Battle of Plassey in 1757. And the policy was to prioritize and glorify "Hindu India" over "Muslim India". Consequently the main task of the Orientalists and Indologists became to unearth and re-establish the glorious religious customs and philosophies of the Hindus, going beyond the immediate history of Muslim rule which the British had to confront and replace.¹⁴

The prioritizing of the Hindu past over the Muslim can also be linked with the emergent Enlightenment concept of Deism.¹⁵ The catholicity of mind it professed apparently found its echo in Hindu 'darshan' enshrined in the different 'shastras'. And this vision of

Enlightened Hinduism was as distant from the Hindu ritualistic practices as it was from the Muslim past of India.

Holwell's book gives us ample evidence about how the British Orientalists differentiated between Hindu and Muslim Indias : while Part I of the book gives us a detailed and derogatory account of Bengal under the Muslim rulers, Part II contains English translations of some hymns to Hindu gods and goddesses, as found in the "shastas", especially in "Chatar Bhade Shasta" (i.e., *caturveda*). Holwell concludes with a dissertation on The Hindu belief of metempsychosis or the theory of rebirth.

Holwell's contemporary, Alexandar Dow wrote a *History of Indostan* which was first published in 1768. The book was actually a translation from the Persian account by Ferishta; and hence the pre-Muslim history of India is dealt with very briefly. But Dow attempted to compensate the lack by adding a separate treatise entitled "A Dissertation Concerning the Customs, Manners, Language, Religion and Philosophy of the Hindoos". The treatise gives an account of the four major philosophical trends of ancient India and also includes a subtle criticism of the degeneration of Hinduism in contemporary India.¹⁶

Thus the emergent Orientalism in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries defined itself against Muslim India as well as against the practices of a degenerated ritualistic Hinduism. And going by this definition, contemporary India was in a "fallen" state. And in all probability Derozio is lamenting this "fall" of India, and not the 'fall' of the Anglo-Indians as pointed out by Bradley-Birt,¹⁷ in poems like "To India — My Native Land".

Hence, it seems that the Muslim in Derozio's poems (like "The Golden Vase") is not merely a "trope" of the foreigner, as Dr. Rosinka Chaudhuri has concluded; but it is the very "other" against which the new and re-invented vision of India is defined. There is absolutely no evidence to support Dr. Chaudhuri's further claim :

A colonial subject, Derozio avoids dealing with British oppression in India directly; instead he uses the Muslim/Hindu conflict to eulogize liberty and freedom, indirectly creating a sense of nationhood that might be seen as defining itself against the colonizer.¹⁸

Derozio never regarded the British as oppressors. Rather, a careful study of Derozio's poems, his journalistic writings and his letters will reveal that his vision of a rejuvenated India depended on the success of British rule.

From the numerous evidences of Derozio's British-worship, here I have chosen his poem, "On the Abolition of Suttee", which was published in the *India Gazette* on 8 December 1829. Without even mentioning the role of the Bengali reformers like

Rammohun Roy in the abolition of the gruesome and barbaric practice of Suttee (*sati*), Derozio's poem glorifies Lord Bentinck who passed the Regulation XVII of 1829 to stop the practice. His encomium seems to know no boundaries :

BENTINCK, be thine the everlasting meed :

* * *

Nations unborn shall venerate Thy name;

A triumph than the conquerer's mightier far;

Thy memory shall be blest, as is the morning star.¹⁹

It seems that Dr. Rosinka Chaudhuri's thesis about Derozio is yet another attempt to theorize resistance where there is no empirical evidence to support it. Such an ahistorical approach reminds us of a danger of a different type. Just as critics like Dr. Chaudhuri are looking for anti-British rhetoric of resistance in Derozio to suit the exigencies of post-colonial studies, some others may appropriate Derozio as an advocate of Hindu nationalist and anti-Muslim gospel, as Chaunticleer cited the 'auctorite' of Cato or Macrobius to justify his position.

The ambiguity of Derozio's position is to be studied in its own historical context. And if after such a study certain things remain unresolved, let them be so : I think there is more glory in walking naked than in the strait-jacket of theory.

Before I conclude one more thing remains to be said. When talking about the emergence of nationalism in nineteenth-century Bengal we must tread with caution. Without belittling the impact of Derozio and his ilk, we must also remember that the actual task of building a modern nation was carried on by the initiatives of the likes of Rammohun Roy and Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar. By the middle of the nineteenth century Derozio and young Bengal had lost their relevance for the Bengali intellectual. Perhaps this is the reason why in Michael Madhusudan Dutt's writings there is no mention of Derozio or his poetry. As regards the relationship between Orientalism and education, with the lapse of time it became redundant and something to be looked at with suspicion. For example, *Friend of India* on 14 June 1855, while reviewing the education scene in Bengal, contemptuously remarked :

In 1813 ... parliament voted a lakh of rupees a year for public instruction. But these funds fell into the hands of the orientalist, whose star was then in the ascendant, ... --- and the enlightenment of the people was totally neglected.²⁰

Notes and References :

1. For details of this struggle see my article 'Paradox of Derozio's Patriotism' in *Frontier* (April 21-27, 2002). It does not seem to be a coincidence that the earliest biographers of Derozio, viz., Thomas Edwards, E.W. Madge and F.B. Bradley-Birt, are interested in Derozio as an Anglo-Indian (or East-Indian). Derozio for them was the forgotten (and perhaps the only) hero of that community whom they sought to revive. Edwards, for example, had planned to write a history of the East-Indians, which never materialized. To compensate, he devoted a large portion of Derozio's biography, including the appendix to document the East-Indians' struggle for identity. See Thomas Edwards, *Henry Derozio, The Eurasian Poet, Teacher, And Journalist* (1884) 2nd edn., with an introduction by R.K. Dasgupta. (Calcutta : Riddhi India, 1980).
2. Though Gautam Chattopadhyay is confident about Derozio's editorship of *The Kaleidoscope*, Suresh Chandra Maitra has refused to accept it; he has cited one P.S. De Rozario as the printer of the periodical. Since he has not been able to provide ample evidence, I do not share Maitra's doubt, and prefer to go with Chattopadhyay. For their respective views see Gautam Chattopadhyay (ed.), *Bengal : Early Nineteenth Century (Selected Documents)* (Calcutta : Research India Publications, 1978); and Suresh Chandra Maitra, *Asanta Kal Jijnasu Yubak* (in Bengali) (Kolkata : Punthipatra, 1988) 81.
3. Gautam Chattopadhyay (ed.), *Bengal : Early Nineteenth Century (Selected Documents)* (Calcutta : Research India Publications, 1978) 8.
4. Chattopadhyay 9.
5. Chattopadhyay 30.
6. Chattopadhyay 30.
7. Rosinka Chaudhuri, *Gentlemen Poets in Colonial Bengal. Emergent Nationalism and The Orientalist Project* (Calcutta : Seagull Books, 2002) 32.
8. Chaudhuri 30
9. Benoy Ghose (ed.) *Selections from the English Periodicals of Nineteenth Century Bengal* Vol. V. (Calcutta : Papyrus, 1980) 101 ff.
10. Chattopadhyay 113.
11. Ernest Renan, 'What is a Nation?' (translated and annotated by Martin Thom) qtd. in Homi K. Bhabha (ed.), *Nation and Narration* (London : Routledge, 1995) 19.
12. Partha Chatterjee's view is quoted in Homi K. Bhabha's essay 'Dissemination : time, narrative, and the margins of the modern nation'. Bhabha (see n.11) 293.
13. Michael John Franklin (ed.), *Representing India* Vol. I (London : Routledge, 2000) 5.
14. The Orientalist attempt to discover India's 'lost' religious past, going beyond the immediacy of the Muslim occupation, can be linked with similar European initiatives in Egypt, Greece

and Persia, which started around the same period. Napoleon's invasion of Muslim-ruled Egypt in 1798 paved the way for modern Egyptology. On the other hand, the Western European involvement in the Græco-Turkish War was often regarded as a necessary intervention for the preservation and rediscovery of the classical heritage of Europe. Lord Byron died fighting for the Greeks (1831), while Derozio in 'Greece' (March, 1827) lamented that Europe is not doing enough for Greece :

Will Europe hear ? -- Aye, calmly hear -

No arm is stretched to save :

Why need'st thou aid? art thou not Greece,

The glorious, and the Grave? (ll. 1-4)

For the poem, see F.B. Bradley-Birt (intro.), *Poems of Henry Louis Vivian Derozio. A Forgotten Anglo-Indian Poet*. 2nd edn. with a foreword by R.K. Dasgupta (Calcutta : Oxford University Press, 1980).

15. For further details, see Wilhelm Halbfass, *India and Europe. An Essay in Understanding* (Albany : State University of New York Press, 1988) 54ff.

16. Franklin Vol. II.

17. Bradley-Birt xvii.

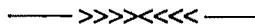
18. Chaudhuri 49.

19. For the poem, see Anil Chandra Dasgupta (ed.), *The Days of John Company. Selections from the Calcutta Gazette. 1824-1832*. (Calcutta : West Bengal Government Press, 1959) 430.

20. Ghose, Vol. III 81.

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EN-GENDERING ANANDAMATH : THE MOTHER AS MYTHOMOTEUR

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Before returning to a wildly controversial and much discussed text for a closer reading I would like to assure the reader that I am not an apologist of *Hindutva* politics, but I do want to question the alarming tendency to link late nineteenth century revivalist discourse with the exclusionary and communal Hindu supremacist agenda of the twentieth century discourse of *Hindutva*, which emerged, as has often been noted, after the 1920s.¹ It is thus forgotten that in nineteenth century revivalist discourse *Hindutva* was often represented as a contested site needing reconstruction, but also vulnerable to the intrusion of colonialist politics. Karl Marx, in his 1853 article called "The Future Results of British Rule in India" drew attention to the British colonial investment in Hinduism in a satirical question which I cannot entirely dismiss as orientalist in the sense of Said,

While they combated the French Revolution under the pretext of defending "our holy religion" did they not forbid, at the same time, Christianity to be propagated in India, and did they not, in order to make money out of the pilgrims streaming to the temples of Orissa and Bengal, take up the trade in the murder and prostitution perpetrated in the temple of Juggernaut ?²

The other point I want to make at the outset is that though feminism is never autonomous in any phase of cultural nationalism and is closely bound to its signifying context³, the inevitable gendering of the nation based on invented and often abstract traditions of womanhood did not actually reaffirm, in the case of India, the boundaries of culturally acceptable feminine conduct which feminists have so often observed in nationalist representations of women as ideological reproducers and cultural carriers of nationality.⁴

That certain lines of Hindu revivalism could be considered threateningly modern and empowering for "women and peasants" by nationalists actively interested in promoting their "traditional" status is suggested, for example, in a satirical poem by Dwijendralal Roy called "Nasiram Paler Baktrita" (*Pradip, Falgun 1304*). The demagogic narrator in this poem is an anglicized traditionalist, heroically committed to preserving the purity of a Victorian ideal of femininity as well as of Sanatan Hindu Dharma by resisting what he sees (or tries to show) as a process of adulteration already breaking the boundaries of the traditional roles of women and peasants.

In Krishna they've given up their faith,
 And taken a way that's not straight ;
 Of Christ-Spencer-Buddha they've cooked up a stew,
 And put in a bit of pure Hinduism too,

* * * *

Gentlemen, the weaker sex in our land
 Have lately grown strong and impossible to command.
 They call it women's education
 But it's social revolution
 To usurp by and by the Kingdom of Man :
 On cooking and other chores they've issued a ban.

* * * *

Some peasants have now the scope
 (Who knows what they really hope?)
 Of sneaking like serpents in our bowers of bliss —
 A rabble of rebels have brought Bengal to this,
 And joined in the crusade born of women's caprice.⁵

Having framed the discursive terrain of Bankimchandra's works within the temporal limits of these two excerpts I will proceed to discuss the scholarly consensus on Bankimchandra's paradigmatic position "as a crucial force in the making of both a nationalist imagination and a Hindu revivalist polemic"⁶. The unhappy consciousness of Bankimchandra is usually neatly divided in terms of two phases of his career as a writer — the early radical phase of works like *Samya* in which he saw caste, class and gender hierarchies as interlinked facets of a transcultural system of inequality, and the later phase after the revivalist upsurge of the late 1870s in which he turned away from problematizing the Hindu woman's social existence in open political prose and embarked on a reconstruction of heroic Hinduism and Hindu nationhood. In this phase he turned more closely to interrogating the post-enlightenment knowledge system after his famous debate with Reverend Hastie in 1882-3,⁷ around the same time as the publication of

Anandamath. Although in his novels of the second phase some of his earlier critiques on the condition of women and peasants are smuggled in at the level of the narrative, they never return to the themes of peasant poverty and caste oppression, resolutely refusing to focus on social stratification and oppression within the Indian tradition as a polemical concern.⁸ It has also been argued that the general reluctance to discuss relations of power within the nation and particularly within the home, unlike the earlier self-critical stance of middle-class Bengali liberals, is a signifying characteristic of Hindu revivalist discourse in the late nineteenth century, which corresponds with a shift from the trope of the wife to that of the mother symbolizing an ideal "inner" affective principle of nationhood. In the liberal phase, the imagining of Hindu conjugality as a haven of domestic affection could accommodate a variety of "dispositions that might mirror or correct or criticise and overturn the values structuring colonialism"⁹. Bankimchandra's own dialogues satirising Babu culture is a case in point. They are never seriously threatened by any disruption of the hierarchical relation between man and wife. The object of satire is the Macaulayan education system which holds the Babu in thrall, and the wife figures as the mocking mouthpiece of a more open-minded and indigenous liberalism, which is not indigenist¹⁰, but critical of the preference of western over native culture and sources of knowledge.

Tanika Sarkar has argued that this grounding of an imagined nation upon the axis of conjugality eventually gave way, under the pressure of events which made visible the controversial status of Hindu wives, to a recognition of force and pain rather than love as the binding principle of Hindu marriage, and over the last decade of the nineteenth century "a new organisational principle was sought beyond conjugality in the loving relationship between mother and son."¹¹ In this article I hope to show how much more complexly the new trope of the mother, which Tanika Sarkar considers an abstraction and unrelated to the gender question, operated in Hindu revivalist discourse of the late nineteenth century. Its strength was derived from an indigenous tradition of motherhood as *Shakti* worship as well as a motherly people's empathy for their daughters' dismal plight after marriage which was articulated in *Agamani* songs. It centred around a thematic of mutual protection, very different from the veneration of Western culture's Supra Mother, whose identity is eminently relational and completely subservient to that of the male child. It is focused on a mutual bond of love and the substitution of eternity for death that Julia Kristeva has identified as primary narcissism.¹² This is how the image of the mother goddess appears in Kamalakanta's "Aamar Durgotsav". But in *Anandamath* it has undergone a more radical, in both its political and cultural sense, transformation. I will shortly come back to this, but for the time being let me just give you two examples of what the trope of the mother was actually doing in late nineteenth century revivalist writings, even when the context was relatively secular.

One of the recurrent contents of this trope was the nationalist elite's alienation from the masses because of their inability to forge an adequate language of communication. In his mock epic on "The Funeral or Mother India" Jogendrachandra Basu satirizes the limits to the Babu's ability to communicate with his mother, now readily identified as a dead motherland. When it is suggested by some of her sons that Mother India should be cremated, another group of sons breaks out in strident protest :

Barbaric art thou ! A degenerate Bengalee !
 In these last stretch of centum nineteen
 Nations ablaze with enlightened views
 Are civilized all. How primitives it is
 To burn thy Mother, nor cease at that
 But to do it on the shores of the Ganges !
 "Prejudice ! Thy name is traitor !" When
 England hears she will curl her lips
 In contempt, the world will laugh — O wretch,
 Thy native stars have condemned thy life
 To futile scholarship¹³

But it turns out that both groups are mistaken about their mother's death. When a wandering Sanyasi (another popular trope in revivalist discourse) points out that their mother is not dead, but might revive if only they knew how to address her, Gayaram says :

"Not dead sayest thou ? False seeming sage,
 I tell thee I called out to her
 A hundred times in English rhymes
 But Mother stirred not, nor made a reply."
 Khudi said — "I called her in French",
 "And I in German, but there was no sound"
 Assured Bhajahari¹⁴

If the names of these sons is a deliberate reminder of the nativist underpinnings of a mimetic nationalism, Amritalal Basu was even more clear about it in his critique of that urgency of public recognition which compels the budding nationalist to yield to the

directives of a state power that he seeks to replace. British directed constitutional nationalism is posited as men's increasing indifference to the reality of domestic hardships which women are expected to tide over, without adequate resources. This satire is cast in the form of the nineteenth century conjugal dialogue with its edge now directed towards the traditionally sanctioned custom of a son's owing his first duty to his mother — who has by 1897 come to be recognized as a ubiquitous signifier of the motherland — even to the extent of being heedless to the complaints of his wife. But ironically, in this process, he neglects his duties to his real mother and daughter, shifting them on to his wife.

Man : This day I dedicate my self to the nation !

Wife : Not at the expense of your domestic relations ?

Man : Commissioners will be elected all over the land !

Wife : Yes, with muscle power and money. Are you quite so bland ?

Man : We'll have to raise subscriptions for India, our Mother.

Wife : And your mother's tattered blankets will be repaired by another.

Man : What can we do to get widows remarried ?

Wife : Your daughters will be grey haired if longer we tarried.

Man : All charity and piety that's gratis I'll end.

Wife : But there won't be a morsel in our house my friend.¹⁵

If motherhood in mid nineteenth century had been defined exclusively as a set of duties towards the son, at the end of the century it was beginning to be defined as a set of reciprocal duties towards the mother, incomplete without an equal attentiveness to domestic welfare.

Bankimchandra's *Anandamath* stands as a watershed between the two phases of his writing and at a conjunctural intersection of the trope of the wife and the trope of the mother in revivalist discourse. The novel was always regarded as propaganda for the reconstitution of a Hindu state, the first of three novels which are explicitly didactic, the other two being *Debi Chaudhurani* and *Sitaram*. Bankim himself is known to have been somewhat apologetic about the aesthetic value of the work.¹⁶ *Anandamath* has thus gone down in history as a political novel, a mere vehicle of the outstandingly evocative song *Bande Mataram*, which was written and probably published in *Bangadarshan* before the novel was written. The popular history of the song and the novel is too well known to be discussed in detail. Represented by western scholars as "the Bible" of Bengali revolutionary nationalism, *Anandamath* became an object of intense communal

controversy after the grand success of *Bande Mataram* as a unificatory rallying cry in early Swadeshi movement and its later adoption by The Indian National Congress as a national anthem. During the Swadeshi movement the British Government, though sympathetic to some symbols of nationalism, reacted most violently against the emotional effect that the song could produce. Even as a slogan it was banned by Lieutenant Governor Fuller in 1906, but in the same year the Bengal Provincial Conference at Barishal, presided over by Abdur Rasul continued to sing it despite police persecution.¹⁷ During the 1920s the Hindu patriotic agenda inscribed in the novel *Anandamath* became synonymous with communalism, and the song which was perceived earlier as a homage to the motherland began to be seen increasingly as a Hindu religious hymn, replete with icons of Hindu mother goddesses and explicit references to Hindu rites of worship. But interestingly, when Islamic periodicals began to emerge with a critique of *Bande Mataram* as idolatrous and polytheistic in inventing an image of the motherland unapproved by the Shariat, it was not marked off for excluding Muslims through its limited symbolic appeal, but for misleading Muslim masses under the leadership of "stupid Swadeshi Maulanas" who made them worship "the mother cow, Tilak, Mother India and the lion-mounted gods and goddesses of the Hindu pantheon."¹⁸ On the part of the Swadeshi Muslims it was pointed out that there could be no justification for questioning the symbolism in Bankim's vision of the motherland as many Persian and Arabic poets had also invoked the motherland as a personality without incurring the charge of idolatry.¹⁹ The greatest tribute to the fading glory of the song was probably given by the old school Muslim leader Liakat Husain who would greet student gatherings at College Square even in the turbulent twenties with the resounding imperative — "Say *Bande Mataram*, you bastards !"²⁰ if they hesitated to respond to a slogan that was becoming the most suspected emblem of Hindu hegemonic overtures.

Bankimchandra was not the first writer in Bengal to invoke the nation as mother. The image had already appeared in the works of writers such diversely (even antipodally) ranged in the intellectual typology of nineteenth century Bengal as Derozio, Iswar Gupta, Michael Madhusudan Dutt and the two older Tagore brothers.²¹ In 1873 a poetic drama entitled *Bharatmata* was written by Kiranchandra Bandopadhyay and staged at the national theatre in Calcutta. The unificatory appeal of this image of the suffering mother was made quite explicit by an allegorical character called "unity" in the play.²² In the same year Akshaychandra Sarkar wrote his article "Dashamahavidya" in *Bangadarshan*, which places the mother image in a decidedly religious context, though it is still not endowed with a specifically religious content. The mother nation is familiarized as a shrivelled and destitute old widow pathetically seeking the protection of her sons in the figure of *Dhumavati*²³, one of the ten major iconic forms of Durga. The subsequent stages in the evolution of the mother, anticipating the famous tunnel scene of *Anandamath*,

are imagined in terms of other iconic forms like the warlike *Matangi* and *Mahalakshmi*, the goddess of prosperity. The image of Mother India also appears as the closest antecedent to Bankim's image in Bhudev Mukhopadhyay's works written in the 1870s, particularly in his *Swapnalabdha Bharater Itihaas* which boldly recognised the legitimacy of "imaginary history" for a colonised people.²⁴ As Sudipta Kaviraj has observed, it is in this margin of historical possibility that fictional consciousness like Bankimchandra's could have free play. This accounts, to a certain extent, for the peculiar status of the novel, rejected as an inteloper in the realms of both romance and history as a neither this nor that by puzzled critics. It is, to borrow Kaviraj's expression again, a deliberate falsification of history²⁵ to explore the terrain of history's unactualized, and I would add, hidden or silenced possibilities, not a fantasy of wish fulfilment or a utopian dream. It was this exploration that yielded a mythomoteur of motherhood in *Anandamath*, beyond the narcissistic identification of the melancholic Kamalakanta.

The mythomoteur, as John Armstrong explains a term coined by Abadal-I-de-Vinegal, is what sustains a polity and enables it to create an identity beyond that which can be imposed by force or purchased by prosperity²⁶. Over long periods of time the legitimizing power of individual mythic structures tends to be enhanced by fusion with other myths in a mythomoteur defining identity in relation to the specific polity.²⁷ Symbols which constitute a mythomoteur are often established as content generations or even centuries before they are communicated to any given members of a group.²⁸ Jasodhara Bagchi, in her discussion of the ideology of Motherhood in colonial Bengal observes that motherhood was all along a culturally privileged concept in Bengal.²⁹ The sign of the mother had already acquired a multidimensional symbolic content which late nineteenth century and Swadeshi nationalists drew upon. Bagchi had discussed extensively the range of significations of mother goddesses in popular Bengali and classical Hindu traditions and it is precisely this multivalent cultural sanction which helped Bankimchandra to transcend the image of the suffering mother located in a realm of "milk and tears"³⁰ (to quote Kristeva), and to move beyond the mother as an object of primary narcissism, as the stable, but illusory centre of a fragile colonial society, providing constant solace to her humiliated son.³¹

Let me quote the passage in "Aamar Durgotsav" where the mother, a hallucinatory spectacle, surfaces laughing and resplendent, only to be submerged in the waters of time. "The mother" is conflated with "my mother" in the acute urgency of helpless loneliness.

I was entirely alone. I felt afraid of my loneliness, entirely lonely, without a mother, calling for my mother. Where is my mother ? I had come to this sea of time searching for my mother. Where is the mother? Where is Bengal who had given life to Kamalakanta? Where are you in this terrible

ocean of time? Suddenly a heavenly music filled my ears, a bright red light like the sun broke out in the horizon, a gentle breeze started blowing and I saw in the great distance over the tumultuous waters draped in gold an idol of the saptami day. It was laughing, floatings on the water, radiating illumination.³² (Tr. Sudipta Kaviraj)

Timeless and elusive, this mother who cannot really satisfy the son's need for identification, is pushed into the utopian future.

I cannot see this form now, not today, nor tomorrow, not before the deluge of time is passed : but we will see it some day Resplendent in her new glory, carrier of new strength, filled with a new pride, seeing new dreams.³³ (Tr. Sudipta Kaviraj)

But the three successive images of the mother in the eleventh chapter of the first book of *Anandamath* as "the mother as she was", "the mother as she is" and "the mother as she shall be" evoke the new awareness of a continually evolving present, and once this central difference is observed, it is possible to read the novel not so much as a positivist parable of order and progress³⁴ but as a mythopoeic, or if you like allegorical, history of the continuing war between state oppression or indifference to the needs of a self-defined people and a group of spiritual crusaders with little preference in the politics of state formation. The famine which sets the context is not merely a prelude to the Condition of India question. Armstrong reminds us that the myth narrator draws the audience of his story away, only to make them set themselves at a desired distance.³⁵ That desired distance was the Great Bengal Famine of 1276, which had already assumed mythical proportions in the mind of the late nineteenth century Bengali. As such it was also the entry point into the "philosophy of poverty" à la Proudhon, but foregrounding the local context of a continuing movement of popular liberation through two different political regimes -- the Mughal and the British. The distancing of the myth to the eighteenth century is particularly successful in blurring the distinction between Mughal and British opportunism. If *Anandamath* has always been castigated for its collaborationist closure, the possibility of a more open ended reading was present in the first version which ends with the promise of another tale, deferred, if it *can* be told.³⁶ But more significantly the idea of a continuing struggle can still be traced in the heavily ironic narratorial aside on Bhavananda's misdirected zeal in the extant version of the novel :

Bhavananda was fuming inside. He meditated on the prospect of being able to strike off the head of this Captain Thomas Sahib Bahadur some day and earn the title of the second enemy slayer. The Santans in those days had not quite realised that the British had come to liberate India. How could they? Even the British contemporaries of Captain Thomas did not know it. The word existed only in the mind of God.³⁷

The mythomoteur does not need historical validity. Its persistence is to be gauged in the effect of the myth recital which is to arouse an intense awareness among the group members of their common fate. It has often been noted that the movement of language from Sanskrit to Bengali in *Bande Mataram* closes in upon the Bengali identity, in a process opposite to Kamalakanta's description of his opium induced vision of Durga.³⁸ The statistical inclusion of both Hindus and Muslims among the children of the mother has also been observed frequently. A corpus of *Shyamasangeet* written by Bengali Muslims from the eighteenth century onwards suggests that the so called Hindu mythomoteur was not unfamiliar to Muslims.³⁹ But as Armstrong tells us again, historical experience shows that if a polity endowed with a very powerful mythomoteur appears in a cultural region, it may produce a demonstrative effect vigorous enough to transform identity throughout the region.⁴⁰ It reminds one of the anxiety of the British authorities about what Curzon had referred to as "the purely Bengali movement" in 1903, before the partition, in a passage which was carefully omitted from Risley's letter written six months later,⁴¹ referring to the popular mood that prevailed particularly in East Bengal. This was before the Swadeshi movement was officially launched. It may also be worth considering the persistence of the mythomoteur of the 'mother in the national songs of the present Bangladesh and wonder whether a deeper cultural identity is at stake than those which have gained visibility during the two successive stages of state formation based on religious and linguistic identity.

In these long years of controversy over the communal significance of the novel what has gone unnoticed is the series of revisions that Bankimchandra made after its first publication in *Bangadarshan* in the years 1881-82. Not only did he insert a didactic foreword which qualifies the Bengali wife's capacity to be the true helpmate of her husband in the first book edition but he felt compelled to add as advertisement an English review that had been published in *The Liberal* to point out that the novel is centred around the question "is the establishment of British supremacy providential in any sense?" and answered it by showing that the immediate providential design was "to put an end to Muslims tyranny and anarchy in Bengal". The more distant and durable blessing of British rule that the author wished to convince his dissenting readers of was the superiority of "the scientific method of the west" and "the creed of English education."⁴² Despite this apologia, however, Bankim significantly left out of his advertisement the following lines from the original article which focus on the novel's palpably crucial theme of mother worship.

"The grand idea in this work is the deification of India as Mother, and the organisation of her worthy children as an order of worshippers devoted to her rescue....He (Bankim) has transferred his beautiful feelings from God to the country, in other words, he has converted piety into patriotism."⁴³

But a more drastic change is undertaken in the fifth and the last edition of the novel, which to my mind, alters the very meaning of womanhood as Bankim had first conceived it and was forced to rectify as not realistic enough in the context of Bengal. It was probably this charge of exceeding the limits of verisimilitude in creating the character of Shanti in *Anandamath* which prompted Bankimchandra to produce *Debi Chaudhurani* in 1884, especially as the charges came from his friend and collaborator Chandranath Basu, to be reiterated by Rabindranath Tagore in 1917.⁴⁴ In his Preface to the fifth edition of *Anandamath*, Bankim reassures his Bengali readers that Shanti has been considerably "tamed".⁴⁵ This was after he realised that he could never portray the character of the Rani of Jhansi, with the comment that "one *Anandamath* has so upset the Sahibs that I shudder to think of the consequences".⁴⁶

The women in Bankimchandra's novels have been read as agents of transgression who unconsciously test the liminality of masculine desire⁴⁷ and certainly, at a didactic level Shanti, and perhaps even Kalyani can be read as variations of that prototype. Ontologically they represent a threat of disruption to the ideal of *Brahmacharya* indispensable to the order of *Anandamath*. But this would be losing of the blindness of a reformist patriarchal outlook to which Bankim himself drew attention in his essay on "Women - Old and New", the insistence on improving the status of women and educating them because they control, more often than not, the desires (*Pravritti*) of men.⁴⁸ Bankim's advocacy of equal rights for women to the extent that he questions "the supreme emphasis that reformers, revivalists and the colonial state equally placed upon the absolute chastity of the Hindu wife"⁴⁹ has often been observed. But the question that Bankim raises in the first edition of *Anandamath* is that of women's difference and their right to epistemological autonomy within the patriarchal order, in other words, of their subjectivity. In a crucial encounter with Satyananda, the ancient commander of the male patriciate of *Anandamath* where the word Santan is still equivalent to son, Shanti proves her equality with, which is really superiority over, the male Santan by stringing a bow reminiscent of the scene of Rama's adolescent display of physical prowess that qualifies him for the hand of Sita. That epic masculine trope of martial heroism is almost at once deflated by Shanti's question "Has every Santan qualified in this test?" and Satyananda's ambiguous answer, "No, I have devised it only to assess their physical strength."⁵⁰ He is then compelled to admit to Shanti that he himself, and Shanti's husband Jivananda, are two Santans who have not qualified in this test. Bankimchandra thus dismisses the very logic of the patriarchal argument for the biological superiority of men by denying that brute force is a signifier of strength. Yet Shanti, who is physically stronger than Jivananda, cannot (or teasingly will not) outrun Jivananda when he chases her to grab her (or him, as Jivananda thinks) by her beard and avenge the insults this cheeky young man has been piling on him. The narrator comments, in an ironically patronising tone expected of the male novelist,

"Whatever Shanti may be, after all she was a woman. Running around was not her cup of tea. But Jivananda was well trained in this trade. He caught her quickly."⁵¹ It would not be a misreading of the text to assume that Bankimchandra is suggesting that it is social conditioning that makes all the difference between levels of efficiency in functions traditionally ascribed to men and women in a culture. Bankim's reiterative device of drawing attention to Shanti's cross-dressing,⁵² is moreover, a constant reminder of the artificiality to gender stereotypes. When Shanti dressed as a sanyasi, complete with a beard which Bankimchandra probably thought too farcical or unwomanly to retain in later versions of the novel, tries to seduce Jivananda by a direct physical appeal she only succeeds in repulsing him. Jivananda realises, to his horror, that it is a woman and not a man who has put his arms around his neck, and he rejects all her pitiful appeals for his love with a determined reference to his *Brahmacharya*.⁵³ But Shanti knows how vulnerable that *Brahmacharya* is. Indeed, as she has already revealed to Satyananda, she actually followed Jivananda in his mission to prevent him from falling into a more serious sin of transgression. Such transgression, she suggests to Satyananda, may occur because the order has denied wives the right to work with their husbands as *Sahadharmini*.⁵⁴ But in the scene that I was discussing, which, if I may beg your pardon, is so reminiscent of Shakespearean comedy, Shanti comments upon how a woman dressed as a man, seeking the love of a man, can be rejected by him more readily as a sinner than a woman with all her femininity intact might be. It is not the prescribed codes of morality, but the norms of femininity that control such perception. In the end she decides to take off her beard before he can truly accept her as his wife and speak to her more naturally. "That's what men are like", she remarks in exasperation.⁵⁵

Shanti, as far as the original *Anandamath* goes, is not marginal to the narrative or to the order of the Sanyasis, but its central attraction.⁵⁶ Even Satyananda, the old patriarch, is conscious that he is susceptible to her charm, and Shanti herself knows how to exploit it without overstepping boundaries. She engages in a dialectic with Satyananda and emerges triumphant even in her capacity for rational argument. While Bankimchandra later felt compelled to supply Shanti with a suitable upbringing to justify her education and independence, in the original version Shanti is presented rather unaccountably and mysteriously with an access to the most prestigious resources of traditional philosophy in which she appears on be self taught. But Satyananda admits, even as he confers Santanhood on Shanti, that he can never presume to know the different (and implicitly superior) perceptions of the female mind, at least as far as sexuality is concerned, for therein resides life or death. Women, he gives us to believe, can see through and beyond *Brahmacharya* which has traditionally been the glorified rationale for a patriarchal overvaluation of the office (in the sense of public duty) in relation to the home and a legitimization for the rejection of woman. "What do I understand?", says Satyananda, "I

am naught but a *Brahmachari* wandering in the forest. How should I be equal to woman?"⁵⁷ With this he entrusts the life of Jivananda to Shanti and implores her to protect it, as well as her *Brahmacharya*. Once again, this unconditional submission to the apparently capricious will of a feminine force unflathomable to man has been a major component in the mythomoteur of the mother in Bengali culture. In being entrusted with the life of her husband, Shanti's wifehood, by forsaking the dependent status of wife, is transformed into empowered motherhood which in turn becomes metonymic of the Hindu state that Bankim had idealistically envisioned as the protectress of a more traditionally masculine Islamic community. The tentativeness and fragility of this vision is self consciously inscribed in *Sitaram*. The first periodical version of that novel clearly sets out Bankim's vision of a protective Hindu state equally attentive to the needs of her Hindu and Muslim children, which Sitaram consents to call Mohammadpur at the suggestion of a Muslim Fakir.⁵⁸ It also invites us to read in the differential of Shree and Jayanti the roots of Sitaram's failure to create such a polity.⁵⁹ Neither this, nor the more disurbing implications of wifehood in *Anandamath* which call for a change in the concept of masculinity can be retained in later versions of the two novels. And so the "Cloister of Happiness" returns to its normal patriarchal order, having rejected Shanti's claim to Santanhood and ejected out of the novel any possibility of reading an extension, and not a revision, of Bankim's earlier statement against the masculine double standard that had been particularly sanctified in Hindu culture — a statement which has so far been regarded as Bankim's most progressive comment on sexual equality: "Chastity of women is necessary for male happiness. For the happiness of women sexual restraint by men is also necessary ; but men constitute society, and woman is nobody."⁶⁰ *Anandamath* seems to suggest that such sexual restraint is not adequately conceivable within the traditional ideology of *Brahmacharya*. It can only be approached by a reconstruction of gender relations. A comparative reading of the different editions of Bankim's novel can reveal other interesting patterns of exclusion. The history and circumstantiality of such textual exclusion, I think, demands as much attention as the history of communal exclusion in his novels.

Notes and References :

1. Tanika Sarkar - "Imagining Hindu Rashtra : The Hindu and the Muslim in Bankimchandra's Writings", *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation : Community, Religion and Cultural Nationalism* (New Delhi, Permanent Black, 2001), p 166.
2. Karl Marx - "Future Results of British Rule in India", *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels : Selected Works in Three Volumes, Vol I* (1969 Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1977), p 498.

3. Deniz Kandiyoti - "Identity and Its Discontents : Women and the Nation", *Colonial Discourse and Post colonial Theory : A Reader*, edited by Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (N. Y./London, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), p 380.
4. See Niras Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias (eds.) - *Woman-Nation-State*, (London, Macmillan 1989).
5. Dwijendralal Roy - "Nasiram Paler Baktrita", *Pradip*, Falgun 1304, pp 82-83.
6. Tanika Sarkar - "Imagining Hindu Rashtra", op. cit. p 163 (Referring to Amalesh Tripathi's *The Extremist Challenge : India Between 1890-1910*).
7. See Tapan Raychaudhuri - *Europe Reconsidered : Perceptions of the West in Nineteenth Century Bengal* (Delhi, O.U.P, 1988).
8. Tanika Sarkar - "Bankimchandra and the Impossibility of a Political Agenda". *Hindu Wife*, pp 139, 156.
9. Tanika Sarkar - "Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation : Domesticity and Nationalism in Nineteenth Century Bengal", *Hindu Wife*, p. 39.
10. Sudipta Kaviraj - *The Unhappy Consciousness : Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay and the Formation of Nationalist Discourse in India* (Bombay/Calcutta/Madras, O.U.P, 1995), pp 51-2.
11. Tanika Sarkar - "Hindu Wife", op. cit. p. 51.
12. See Julia Kristeva - "Stabat Mater", *Contemporary Literary Criticism : Literary and Cultural Studies*, edited by Robert Con Davis and Ronald Schleifer (New York, Longman Inc, 1989 2nd Edition).
13. Jogendra Chandra Basu - "Bharatmatar Sraddha", *Byangokobita O Ganey Swadeshikata*, edited by Soumyendra Gangopadhyay (Calcutta, Sanskrit Pustak Bhandar, 1917), p 113.
14. Ibid, p 115.
15. Amritlal Basu - A song from the play *Gramya Bibhrat* (1897), reprinted in *Byangokobita O Ganey*, p 104.
16. Lalitchandra Mitra writes that Bankimchandra had confessed to him that the novel was good in "sense", but it lacked "art". Mitra - "Bande Mataram", *Narayan*, 1322 reprinted in *Bankim Prasanga*, edited by Sureschandra Samajpati (1922, Calcutta, Navapatra Prakashan, 1982), pp 170-71.
17. Jiban Mukhopadhyay - *Anandamath O Bharatiya Jatiyatabad* (Calcutta, Bhaswati, 1980), p 194.
18. Ibid, pp 194-96.
19. Rezaul Karim - *Bankimchandra O Musalman Samaj* (Calcutta, Anandamayi Book Depot, 1944), p 96.
20. Jiban Mukhopadhyay - op. cit. p. 194.
21. Ibid, p 24.
22. Ibid, p 49.
23. Ibid, p 49-50.

24. See Sudipta Kaviraj - op. cit.
25. Ibid.
26. John A. Armstrong - *Nations Before Nationalism* (Chapel Hill, Univ. of North Caroline Press, 1982), p 293.
27. Ibid, p 9.
28. Ibid, p 8.
29. See Jasodhara Bagchi - "Representing Nationalism : Ideology of Motherhood in Colonial Bengal", *Economic and Political Weekly*, October 20-27, 1990.
30. Julia Kristeva, "Stabat Mater", op. cit., p 195. "Milk and tears became the privileged signs of the *Mater Dolorosa* who invaded the West beginning with the eleventh century, reaching the peak of its influx in the fourteenth."
31. Jasodhara Bagchi - "Representing Nationalism", op. cit., p WS 66.
32. Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay - "Aamar Durgotsab", *Kamalakanter Daptar, Bankim Rachanasangraha (Prabandha Khanda Part I)*. ed. Gopal Halder (Calcutta, Saksharata Prakashan, 1974), p 149.
33. Ibid.
34. See Jasodhara Bagchi, "Positivism and Nationalism : Womanhood and Crisis in Nationalist Fiction : Bankimchandra's *Anandamath*", *Narrative : Forms and Transformations* ed. Sudhakar Marathe and Meenakshi Mukherji (Delhi, Chanakya Publications, 1986).
35. J. A. Armstrong - op. cit., p 9.
36. The first edition of *Anandamath*, published in December 1882, concludes with the lines - "The fire that Satyananda had sparked was not extinguished easily. I shall tell that story later if I can." See *Anandamath* (1st edition) reprinted in *Anandamath : Rachanar Prerona O Parinam* by Chittaranjan Bandopadhyay (Calcutta, Ananda Publishers, 1983).
37. Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay - *Anandamath* 3 ii, *Bankim Rachanasangraha (Upanyas Khanda)*, p 707.
38. See Sudipta Kaviraj - op. cit.
39. See Amiya Sankar Choudhury (ed), *Muslim Kabider Shyama Sangeet (Nazrul byatito)* (Calcutta, Camp, 2000).
40. Armstrong - op. cit. p 297.
41. Sumit Sarkar - *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal 1903-1908* (1973 New Delhi, People's Publishing House, 1994). p 17.
42. See Chittaranjan Bandopadhyay, op. cit. pp 85-6.
43. Ibid, p 41.
44. Jiban Mukhopadhyay - op. cit. p 76.
45. See the advertisement to the 5th edition of *Anandamath*, reprinted in Bandopadhyay, op. cit. p 87.
46. See Bankimchandra's letter to Girish Chandra Majumder cited in Mukhopadhyay, op. cit. p 20.

47. See Sudipta Kaviraj - op. cit.
48. Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay - "Prachina ebong Nabina", *Bankim Rachanasangraha, Prabandha Khanda Part I*, p 316. Bankim dismissed the patriarchal argument that the condition of women is a determinant of the well being or degradation of men in any society.
49. Tanika Sarkar - "Imagining Hindurashtra", op. cit. p 166. In *Samya*, Bankim had also "made startling suggestions about (woman's) future independence and about men sharing housework."
50. Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay - *Anandamath* (1st edition) reprinted in Bandopadhyay, op. cit. pp 90-3.
51. Ibid, p 99.
52. Shanti's beard, in particular, is a matter of grave inconvenience to her in her encounters with both Satyananda and Jivananda. Satyananda sees through it and identifies it as an excess. Jivananda is repelled by it and shrinks away from Shanti.
53. See *Anandamath* (1st edition) reprinted in Bandopadhyay, op. cit. pp 99-101.
54. Ibid, p 92.
55. Ibid, p 103.
56. See Vera Novikov - *Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay : His Life and Works*, Trans, Nishitesh Banerjee (Calcutta, National Publishers, 1976), p 156. According to Novikov, who calls *Anandamath* "The Cloister of Happiness", Chandranath Basu "placed special emphasis on the heroine, Shanti, a women patriot, without whom the novel would have suffered in excellence to a high degree."
57. See *Anandamath* (1st edition), reprinted in Bandopadhyay, op. cit. p 93.
58. See chapter thirteen in the periodical version of Bankimchandra's *Sitaram*, first printed in *Prachar* and appended as "Pathabhed" in *Sitaram*, edited by Brajendranath Bandopadhyay and Sajanikanta Das (Calcutta, Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, 1346), pp 177-180.
59. See conclusion to the same, which invites Jayanti to take her stand beside Prafulla (*Debi Chaudhurani*) as a superior ideal of *Sanyas* than Sri.
60. Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay - "Prachina ebong Nabina", op. cit. p 317.

‘POST – ISMS’ : SOME OBSERVATIONS ON ‘POST-’

Krishna Sen

The prefix ‘post-’ has emerged as the millennial mantra of the most fashionable ‘isms’ of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. ‘Postmodernism’ and ‘poststructuralism’ (with or without the intercalary hyphen) are the dominant markers of the post-industrial, post-realist society of the West, in which the new face of late capitalism is said to have changed from ‘Fordism’ to ‘post-Fordism.’¹ At the other end of the socio-political spectrum, ‘post-colonialism’ flaunts its post-imperialist, post-Eurocentric credentials as the redemptive gospel of Third World countries and colonized communities. In the early 1990s, the relativistic worldviews of postmodernism and poststructuralism were challenged by ‘postpositivist realism.’² And a much-discussed twenty-first century publication with contributors of the likes of Christopher Norris and Catherine Belsey informs us that we have already entered the era of ‘Post-Theory.’³

What is this ‘post’ that adorns so many ‘isms’? To very many people it is nothing more than a dubious signifier floating in a sea of hype. Even the less prejudiced are unsure of its precise connotation since, depending on the context, it appears to define every thing from textual meaning (poststructuralism) to the complexity of cultural interrelations (post-colonialism) to wider claims about the status of knowledge (postmodernism, as in, say, Lyotard’s *The Postmodern Condition : A Report on Knowledge*). Nevertheless, the ‘post’ -word, if one may call it that, enjoys a peculiar currency, as is evident from Ihab Hassan’s tongue-in-cheek account of the journey of the term ‘postmodern’ in his *The Postmodern Turn* :

Fastidious academics once shunned the word *postmodern* as they might shrink from the shadiest neologism. But now the term has become a shibboleth for tendencies in film, theatre, dance, music, art and architecture; in philosophy, theology, psychoanalysis and historiography; in new sciences, cybernetic technologies, and various cultural lifestyles ... and beyond that, it has penetrated the discourse of late Marxist critics who, only a decade ago, dismissed the term as another instance of the dreck, fads and folderol of a consumer society.⁴

It is interesting that the ‘post’ of this particular ‘ism’ has a kind of chameleon quality that enables it to interpellate everything from aesthetics to cybernetics. This is a characteristic shared by its other manifestations as well—the poststructuralist ‘turn’ encompasses the gamut from myth to cyborgs, and post-colonial theory is nowadays applied even to the technically non-colonized, such as the Chicanos and Tejanos in

south-western United States.⁵ Despite its variability, however, the 'post-' has in every case a tendency to destabilize or render ambiguous whatever root it qualifies since it always claims to gesture beyond or behind or away from the core word (structure/colonialism/modern), thus never allowing the root or core to control the ultimate meaning. To understand the nature of this destabilization, it is necessary to look at the three basic parameters within which the 'post-' operates – chronological, political, and what may be called the phenomenological.

'Post-', in the sense of 'coming after,' has usually been understood as a simple indicator of chronological succession, as in 'post-classical,' 'post-Romantic' and 'post-War.' By contrast, the 'post-' of our current 'post-isms' goes beyond chronicity, and argues for a conceptual and ideological autonomy for the new term which is quite unrelated to the dictionary meaning of the root. 'Postmodernism' is a case in point. 'Post-Modernism,' with a hyphen and a capital M, would simply mean that which followed, or reacted to, Modernism. But 'Postmodernism' is a contradiction in terms since the modern is that which is current, and nothing can already exist after the current. The dropping of the hyphen implies the erasure of the temporal axis and the creation of a neologism that predicates a certain kind of modernity, rather than a sequel to modernity. According to Ihab Hassan, 'postmodernism is plural, hybrid, ironic, an aspect of developed media-driven societies, a feature of a globalized and localized earth.'⁶ In this sense, it has more to do with a particular kind of material culture and the norms which it engenders than with the aesthetics of Western Modernism.

Again, Poststructuralism is seen to be the antithesis, rather than the consequence, of Structuralism in Foucault's seminal Preface to Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*, which is often referred to as one of the earliest theoretical enunciations of the postmodern and the poststructural. In his famous seven-point manifesto, Foucault sought to universalize the poststructural by going beyond the socio-cultural specificities of late capitalism to the abstract (and hence, atemporal) ideology of plasticity, plurality and play. Here are his first three credos :

Free political action from all unitary and totalizing paranoia.

Develop action, thought, and desires by proliferation, juxtaposition, and disjunction and not by subdivision and pyramidal hierarchization.

Withdraw allegiance from the old categories of the Negative (law, limit, castration, lack, lacuna) which Western thought has so long held sacred as a form of power and an access to reality. Prefer what is positive and multiple, difference over uniformity, flows over unities, mobile arrangements over systems. Believe that what is productive is not sedentary but nomadic.⁷

Structuralism is identified with the paranoia of the compulsive system-builder, and the resultant schizophrenic dissociation of mind and matter is to be healed by the poststructuralist flow that acknowledges (rather than absorbs and reifies) ruptures, gaps and heterogeneities.

In both cases the deleting of the hyphen implies the erasure of simple temporality and succession, thereby de-linking the 'post'-word from its root. Postmodernism and Poststructuralism are independent entities to which Modernism and Structuralism are related only as introduction or prelude. So the 'post'-word supersedes rather than succeeds its root. One might of course argue that simple chronology had already been problematized by the Modernist multi-text which, through the use of subtexts and analogues, superimposed simultaneity upon chronicity. Eliot described the process as 'manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity.'⁸ Eliot's conception of the totality created by the intersection of tradition and the individual talent re-inflects the notions of order and succession in an unusual way. The new work is more than just an addition or aggregation, it is a new part of a completely new whole :

The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them. The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the *whole* existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted... the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past.⁹

Eliot's conception of an ever-changing order and a continuously mutating whole is indeed radical. The important thing, though, is that Eliot does not negate the existence and the possibility of concatenation, continuity, order and wholeness. In view of the constructivist nature of the postmodern and poststructuralist conception of reality (usually defined as postmodern pastiche versus Modernist montage), Derrida's position on the relationship between the new work and the existing body of literature is naturally different. Arguing that reading is a double-focused project embracing 'two contradictory ideas,' our reading of a text as conditioned by our reading as a whole, so that the text remains both specific and non-specific ('although it is entirely consumed by the reading of other texts, in a certain fashion [it] refers only to its own writing'), Derrida observes :

Therefore it would be impossible to provide a linear, deductive representation of these works that would correspond to some "logical order." it is necessary to read and reread those in whose wake I write, the "books" in whose margins and between whose lines I mark out and

read a text simultaneously almost identical and entirely other ... that two "volumes" are to be inscribed one *in the middle of* the other is due, you will agree, to a strange geometry ... one writes with two hands ... by means of this double play, marked in certain decisive places by an erasure which allows what it obliterates to be read, violently inscribing within the text that which attempted to govern it from without ...¹⁰

Edward Said put his finger on this difference in his article, 'Globalizing Literary Study':

Whereas Auerbach, T.S. Eliot, Lukacs, Blackmur, Frye, Leavis, Burke, Richards and Wellek ... all inhabited a mental and aesthetic universe that was linguistically, formally and epistemologically grounded in the European and North Atlantic world of the classics, the church and the empire ... of canonicity, synthesis and centrality, scholars of the new generation are much more attuned to the non-European, genderized, decolonized, and decentered energies and currents of our time.¹¹

With Eliot, the new work reinscribes the existing synchronic order of literature. With Derrida, the new work moves into an already inflected and diachronic linguistic space, and re-inflects it often violently. At the risk of compounding neologisms, one might say that Eliot speaks of the 'post-text,' while Derrida speaks of the 'posttext' that tunnels and burrows into the 'host' texts, setting in motion an infinite succession of aporias.

This rupturing and de-constructing/deconstructing of an existing order in place of modulating and modifying it, which is in effect a violent negation of the very concepts of order and succession (indicated through the dropping of the hyphen), cannot but have political overtones, as Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* makes amply clear. Plurality and play are the antitheses of the will to power. The anti-authoritarian politics of postmodernism has been tracked all the way from cultural relativism and liberal pluralism to anarchism, and has been excoriated as a theorizing of experience without demonstrating any obligation towards social responsibility, or any commitment towards the public sphere. Strangely, postmodern politics in the form of pluralism and multiculturalism has of late come under attack from some of those very minorities and marginalized groups that it seeks to champion. Satya P. Mohanty has quoted A. Sivanandan on the degradation of the African-American struggle — 'Multiculturalism deflected the political concerns of the black community into the cultural concerns of different communities, the struggle against racism to the struggle for culture.'¹² Thus the erasure of the hyphen predicates the erasure of continuity, whether in literature or politics.

By contrast, the retention of the hyphen becomes provocatively political in 'post-colonial,' which is only recently wavering towards 'postcolonial' under the pressure of fairly strong cultural protest. In *The Empire Writes Back* Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin famously articulated literary and cultural post-colonialism ultimately in political terms as forms of subversion and resistance. That heroic narrative has since been questioned. It has been argued that characterizing post-imperial societies as 'post-colonial' unnecessarily foregrounds the colonial inheritance at the expense of earlier and richer heritages in the national experience, and by a strange twist of terminology still retains the 'colonial' as the dominant marker of the newly independent nation. Perpetual subversion and resistance virtually locks the ex-colonized into their colonial past. In 'Resistance Theory/Theorizing Resistance, or Two Cheers for Nativism,' the West Indian critic Benita Parry has extended the terms of the debate from the material to the psychological sphere. She argues that simply identifying the post-colonial with a rhetoric of resistance does not wash away the deep scars embedded in the national psyche as a result of several centuries of exploitative hegemony, the more so since the demeaning colonial construction of the native in many cases continues to govern in a damaging way the native's self-perception. Parry's argument is a variant of Kwame Nkrumah's celebrated charge that the term 'post-colonial' emits a false optimism because it masks the pernicious reality of neo-colonialism, in terms of cultural, economic, and sometimes even (covert) political domination.

The politics of the 'post-' in 'post-colonial' has been exacerbated by Palestinian critic Ella Shohat's extremely polemical essay, 'Notes on the Post-colonial,' in which she exposes two fallacies implicit in the term — first, that it lumps together the white ex-colonized such as Australians and Canadians with the black, brown and yellow ex-colonized from Asia and Africa as being equally disinherited and marginalized, which is absolutely not the case; and second, that it ignores people who have not technically been conquered, but who are virtually colonized within their own country, like the Palestinians of the West Bank.¹³ The most recent salvo in the politics of the post-colonial has been fired by 'liberated' Eastern European intellectuals after the collapse of the former Soviet Union — they contend that the identification of colonization solely with nineteenth-century European imperialism places under erasure the pain of the 'colonized' peoples of the Balkans and the Baltic under Soviet 'occupation.'¹⁴ Arguments like these are slowly changing 'post-colonial' to 'postcolonial,' rendering it an ideological rather than a temporal phenomenon.

How has the doyen of contemporary post-colonial theory, Bill Ashcroft, responded to these charges of political insensitivity and socio-cultural myopia? His most recent major work, *On Post-Colonial Futures: Transformations of Colonial Culture* (2001), virtually reinvents the term by allying it now, not with subversion and resistance, but with

‘transformation’ and ‘circulation.’ Colonial mores circulate within the newly liberated socio-cultural matrix, and become so radically transformed that they retain virtually no connection with the original impetus, and in many case actually overtake it :

Transformation described the way in which colonized societies have taken dominant discourses, transformed them and used them in the service of their own self-empowerment ... This is no where more obvious than in literary and other representational arts, but it remains a strategic feature of all cultural practice. This is why cultural influence circulates, rather than moves in a straight line ‘downward’ from the dominant to the dominated.¹⁵

This new ‘circulation’ theory of the post-colonial not only accounts for phenomena such as the ‘bhaji on the beach’ culture that has swept Britain, for example, but more important, updates post-colonial theory in the light of globalization, trans-national business, and the international media.

What accounts for the complexity of this prefix ‘post-’? The phenomenology, if one may call it that, of ‘post-’ has been scrutinized by Robert Young in ‘Poststructuralism : The End of Theory.’ Young draws attention to the fact that Latin ‘post’ has a variety of meanings – it can relate to place (behind, as in ‘posterior’), and time (after, as in ‘post-natal’), which may involve sequence (next). In referring to that which is behind or before as well as that which is in front or after, depending on one’s point of reference, ‘post-’ is in a sense also ‘pre-’. It is Janus-faced – it is both change and the pre-condition of change. Young says – “poststructuralism suggests that structuralism itself can only exist as always already inhabited by poststurturalism, which comes both behind and after In this sense poststructuralism becomes structuralism’s primal scene.”¹⁶ Young is here echoing Lyotard’s perception of a recursive relationship between modernism and postmodernism in the essay appended to *The Postmodern Condition*, ‘What is Postmodernism?’ – ‘A work can become modern only if it is first postmodern. Postmodernism is not modernism at its end but in the nascent state, and this state is constant...*Postmodern* would have to be understood according to the paradox of the future (L.post) anterior (L.moda)’. As Fredric Jameson has explained in his explicatory Foreword to Lyotard’s book – “In a striking formula he [Lyotard] has characterized postmodernism, not as that which follows modernism and its particular legitimization crisis, but rather as a cyclical moment that returns before the emergence of the *new* modernisms in the stricter sense.”¹⁷

Lyotard rightly says of the prefix ‘post-’ – ‘It tends to jolt everyday discourse into a kind of metadiscourse’¹⁸ Far from being passive, it functions in a dynamic manner, operating within and against and across and between discourses, calling up circulatory

flows and energies, and simultaneously subverting and extending their primary significations. 'Post-' is the favourite of theory because it is both dialectical and dialogical. One might follow J.L Austin and call it, metaphorically, a 'performative' – 'the issuing of the utterance is the performance of an action.'¹⁹ However, if Geoffrey Bennington is to be believed, with the post 9/11 world crying out for ethical relationships, the 'post-' with its subtleties and subversions is dead – 'Let's bury our differences Consensus is nigh. Theory is finished Dead and buried. Interred. Sound the last post. Post-theory. Post post.'²⁰ The new buzz word should be 'Inter-' according to Bennington, because it suggests connection ('inter-state') as well as separation ('interval'). It is of course too early to tell. Who knows but that the interred 'post-' might still have one last posthumous laugh.

Notes and References :

1. See Alex Callinicos, *Against Postmodernism, A Marxist Critique*, Polity Press, Oxford, 1989, p. 134 : 'Just as Fordism was created by producers such as its eponymous founder post-Fordism is consumption-led.'
2. See Satya P. Mohanty, *Literary Theory and the Claims of History : Postmodernism, Objectivity, Multicultural Politics*, Cornell U.P., Ithaca, 1997.
3. Martin McQuillan ed. *Post-Theory*, Edinburgh U.P., 2000.
4. Ihab Hassan, *The Postmodern Turn : Essays in Postmodern Theory and Culture*, Ohio State University Press, Columbus, 1987, p.xi.
5. See Amritjit Singh and Peter Schmidt, *Postcolonial Theory and the United States : Race Ethnicity and Literature*, University Press of Mississippi, 2000.
6. Ihab Hassari, 'Globalism and its Discontents : Notes of a Wandering Scholar', *MLA, Profession*, 1999, p.60.
7. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus, Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, The Athlone Press, London, 1972, rpt. 1996. p. xiii.
8. T.S. Eliot's review of Joyce's *Ulysses*. 'Ulysses, Order and Myth,' *The Dial*, LXXX, 1923, p. 6.
9. T.S. Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent,' *Selected Essays*, Faber, London, 1932, rpt. 1972, p.15.
10. Jacques Derrida, 'Implications: Interview with Henri Ronse' in *Positions* (1972), trans Alan Bass, U. of Chicago Press, 1981, pp. 3-4, 6.
11. PMLA, January 2001, 16:1, p. 65.

12. Mohanty, op. cit., p. 17.
13. Parry's and Shohat's essays are both available in Padmini Mongia ed. *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory, A Reader*, O.U.P., New Delhi, 1997.
14. See David Moore, 'Is the "Post-" in "Post-Colonial" the "Post-" in Post-Soviet ? Towards a Global Post-Colonial Critique,' PMLA, January 2001, 16:1.
15. *On Post-Colonial Futures*, Continuum, London, 2001, 1.
16. Oxford Literary Review, 5, 1982, 3-15. The quotation is from p.4.
17. The quotations are from Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition trans*, Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, U of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1984, pp. 79-81, xvi.
18. Ibid., p. 62.
19. J.L. Austin, *How to do Things with Words*, 2nd Ed., Harvard U.P., Cambridge, 1975, p.6.
20. Geoffrey Bennington, 'Inter,' in McQuillan ed. *Post-Theory*, op.cit, p. 103.



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Here are some examples of the preferred mode of citation :

A. Bullock, *The Humanist Tradition in the West*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1985, p.35.

John D. Rosenberg ed., *The Genius of John Ruskin : Selections from His Writings*, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1964, pp. 88-89.

Francis J. Molson, 'Emily Dickinson's Rejection of the Heavenly Father', *New England Quarterly*, Vol. 47, September 1974, p.404.

8. Research scholars who are currently not teaching whole-time or part-time at either UG or PG level are requested to furnish their research particulars viz. University affiliation, name of supervisor, title of thesis and date of registration.